

IRISH Writing

EDITED BY DAVID MARCUS & TERENCE SMITH



THE MAGAZINE OF CONTEM-
PORARY IRISH LITERATURE

27

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St. Martin's Street, London, W.C.2.

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NUMBER TWENTY-SEVEN

JUNE, 1954

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Folie de grandeur

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ELIZABETH BOWEN

THE DINNER PARTY

A Chapter from a New Novel

'THIS HAS BEEN WONDERFUL OF YOU,' SAID LADY LATTERLY. Turning on her stool at the dressing table, she clawed the air in the direction of Jane's hand. 'Sit anywhere, then we can soon talk.'

'How quickly you've cleared up after the Fête,' observed Jane, gazing out at the castle lawns.

'I pay all these men; why should they not work?'

'Still, it was kind of you sending the car twice.'

'You were not on the telephone; you had no car,' pointed out Lady Latterly in an unresigned tone.

'We have a car, but it had gone to the sea.'

'Oh. You have a house at the sea?'

'No.'

'What a bother for you,' remarked her new friend, busy unlocking a jewel case.

Jane went on: 'Yesterday feels like years ago.'

'Don't speak of it!' With a dart like a jackdaw Lady Latterly found an emerald ring, forcing it on, made it flash undecidedly, tore it off. She shuddered: 'Never again!'

'Oh? Everybody enjoyed it.'

'Who *are* all these people? What do they think I am?'

'You don't hunt yourself?'

'Not only should I be terrified, but I've a thing for foxes.'

'I wonder what you do in the winter, then?'

'I don't; it couldn't be simpler. I go away.'

Jane introspectively said: 'I have not been here in winter for ages either.'

'Oh, so that's where you've always been, is it—not here? Why has nobody told me you existed?'

'I don't expect it's very generally known.'

'You go racing, surely? Why have I never seen you?'

'I imagine because I am never there.'

'You ought to do something about that,' said Lady Latterly, abstractedly leaning forward to view her make-up foreshortened inside the triple glass. She reapplied mascara—in a wrapper she sat with her back to Jane.

So many hours of the girl's life had already gone by in women's bedrooms that Jane, on being shown up here, felt a touch of mutiny. Not for this had she come. She would have liked to wait downstairs in the drawingroom whose theatrical emptiness had been glimpsed through an open door as she was conducted past it. However, with every possible grace she first sat down on the edge

of, later reclined across the lustrous oyster quilt of the vibrant low bed, in an attitude of compliant ease. *Here*, it was true, the scene was differently set—no smears, no ash, no feathers on the floor; instead, whole areas of undinted satin, no trace of anything having been touched or used. Here and there only, footprints like tracks in dew disturbed the bloom of the silver carpet. Here, supposed Jane, courteously looking round, must be a replica, priceless these days, of a Mayfair *décor* back in the 1930's—apparently still lived in without a tremor. Fancy, to know so little when one could spend so much! The necessity, the fragility and perhaps the pathos of all of this as a carapace did not strike the young girl. The bedroom gained still more unreality by now seeming trapped somewhere between day and night—this marvel of marbling and mirror-topping, mirror-building-in and prismatic whatnots being at the moment a battleground of clashing dazzling reflections and refractions. Crystal the chandelier dripped into the sunset; tense little lit lamps under peach shades were easily floated in upon by the gold of evening. Day had not done with the world yet; trees were in the conspiracy. The outdoors, light-shot, uncannily deepening without darkening, leaned through the too-large windows—a blinding ray presently splintered over the dressing table. With a cry, Lady Latterly downed tools.

'I can't see myself, you see! I can't see a thing!'

'Oh, I expect it will pass off.'

'Any moment, these bastards will be arriving!'

Jane asked: 'Is it a large party?'

'Eight or ten; it depends if some of them come.' Lady Latterly rose, cast away her wrapper and, in little else, stood vibrating as though with an engine running.

'I could help,' said the girl, 'if I knew where anything was.'

'That is so, so sweet of you, but I've no idea.' She set off on a lonely expedition to a hanging closet, and came back dragging a chiffon dress. 'No notion how to get *into* this; my maid's gone.'

'For ever?'

'Yes, couldn't stand the country. None of these people have any hearts.'

'I thought your butler looked kind.'

'He's going.'

It was about two years since Lady Latterly had bought this unusually banal Irish castle, long empty owing to disrepair. Rumours which had preceded her into the country had not yet by any means died down, and were unlikely to. She was raven-haired, handsome, haunted—nobody could be certain by quite what. Her trials, since she took up residence here, had been not less interesting than her reputed fortune—the number of baths she had had installed under dry tanks, the lovers said or servants known to have left her, the failure of her house-parties to arrive or, still worse, leave again, the costly fiasco of her herbaceous border, the delays, non-deliveries, breakages, leakages and general exploitation she had endured lost nothing in telling except sympathy for her: one is as rich as that at one's own risk. She was *nouveau riche*; but, as Antonia said, better

later than never.

But if she chose to make history out of her vicissitudes, that was really from vauntingness—nothing beat her; she had a way of worsting one. Now she was cunningly finding her way into her own dress; and as the yards upon yards of sun-coloured chiffon perfectly fell into place around the hostess, leaving her only to make negligent play with a few loops, Jane's spirits mounted: this *was* what one had come for! For the girl tonight was in a mood for the theatre, and for that only—what else, as a finale to her inconceivable day, was to be endured? Here she was, spirited out of Montefort into this foreign dimension of the castle, in which nothing, no one could be unreal enough.

As to that, Lady Latterly finally put together satisfied all requirements. Soaring over the chiffon her neck, arms, shoulders seemed to be made of plastic, pure of humanity. Her face by being worn tilted back brought the more into notice a flawless jawline, which her eyes, turning down under varnished lids, would have contemplated were it but in their view. She had taken on again yesterday afternoon's air of commanding nonchalance. Satiety was in her attitude as, having billowed back to the dressing table, she used the scent spray; and as she turned her head this way, that way, clipping on earrings, she had to let out a little sigh—she had more even of breath than she could do with. Imperviously, together with Jane, she heard car after car come up the avenue, make a scrunching turn on the gravel, stop. Guests, fresh to the evening, greeted each other in daylight out on the castle steps.

'Do go down, and say I'll be down. Amuse them.'

'They will not know who I am.'

'That will amuse them.'

Jane entered a drawingroom black-and-white at the door end with standing men. As she advanced towards them the sound-track stopped. Bowers of flowers cascaded fern mist from the piano top; jaded late green heat came in at the open windows. The room, more quenched, less dazzling than that above by being a minute further towards nightfall, was overcast by the outdoor rise of lawns and encased in walls of transparent blue. Brought to a standstill under all these eyes by the slight shock of the sense of her own beauty, Jane said, 'Lady Latterly will be late,' for the first time wondering why. A woman, the apparently only other, diagonal in a black dress on a white sofa, nodded tardily at her over a picture paper, then took a cigarette out of a box—scoffingly, she had lighted it for herself before the group had so far collected its wits as to break ranks. Who knew where they had all come from? The girl, at the advantage of being less surprised by them than they were by her, detachedly heard the silence break up into a clash of experimental, isolated remarks. She had no way of identifying the male speakers, nor did she try to—she looked from face to face, with her lips apart, uncertain as to whom to award the golden apple of her attention.

The fact was not only that she distinguished no one but that, so

far, so compact was the group that all these alike, anonymous masks seemed to be attached to the same body, one abstract shirt-front. Yet she was somehow edified, already partly won, for about this composite there was something legendary—here, she was in the presence of a race she did not know yet, yet somehow knew of. Veterans in experience of their own kind, they made her feel an aggregate of maturity, of assimilated well-being, and of a vigour rather the more marked by being a little on the decline. She took them to be men of the world—what world might be left to be of, she did not ask herself. Some, perhaps, she had seen at the Fête, some not. None were young; one or two stood out as older than others—and one now again stood out by strolling away, by proclaiming himself subtly at home in this house, where the rest were nothing more than at ease, by a proprietary move to the tray of drinks. Jane had to suppose this must be in order—from the others' rather striking lack of expression, evidently it was, but was so for a reason they would have preferred the girl not to comprehend. Perturbed, she could but watch the decanter being so masterfully unstopped—till, to divert what might be her waking thoughts, someone near her spoke up. So, he said, she was staying here?

'Oh, no. I live near here.'

'Is that really so? Far from here?'

'Everywhere's far from here,' she said, elatedly taking in the fictitious room.

'Round here, you know, that seems to be true of everywhere. All the same, it's extraordinary how one gets about.'

Jane had, rather naturally, not thought of that: she was wondering how to be candid but not aloof when Lady Latterly, having come swishing in at the door behind her with no warning other than displaced air, swept an arm round her waist. The embrace, though intended chiefly to strike a note, was at first startling: the girl, inside the tightening arm, found herself being pivoted this way, that way, while the hostess waved round the company with her other hand. Greeting was thus very cleverly sunk in showmanship—Lady Latterly was either defying them to have seen enough of Jane, or inviting them to look at the girl again in the new and entrancing relationship she had with her. Loathing of the beginning of a party caused her, each time, to hit upon some device—and tonight, her triumphing air asked, what could one have hit upon that was better? 'Tommy, Mamie, Tipps, Fitz, Terence!' she called, 'isn't *this* lovely?' And she beat a tattoo upon Jane's ribs, more to keep the girl silent than make her speak. 'Where did I find her? Ah!' Then: 'Have you told them who you are?' she asked, just not entangling an earring in Jane's hair. 'I expect not.'

Lastly, she swung the girl and herself right round, to face upon the man who was acting host. The tray was some way away down the room: in step, in Siamese closeness, they packed towards it. Ice was being made rattle in her shaker: he paused, but only in order to say nothing, which he did with what might or might not be considered enough eloquence. An indecisive engagement between two

pairs of eyes took place, and took up enough time to make Jane, held like a ventriloquist's doll, wonder whether she could indeed be expected to be a mouthpiece—if so, Lady Latterly was let down. Lady Latterly finally said, 'Why, hullo,' in a voice of modulated surprise at having come upon him, of all people, here, or indeed anywhere in the world at all. She then told Jane: 'This is my barman.' His experienced wrist went back to work: they looked on—yellow chiffon falling against the yellowed muslin. (Jane wore the morning's dress, skirts pressed, top hastily cut out and sleeves away, for she had nothing better with her at Montefort.) Lady Latterly, braced against the fortification of Jane's body, was able to be at her most impervious—airily stretching her whipcord throat up, she brought the whole of the fearlessness with which she could be forty into display next this young country beauty. He, meanwhile, unscrewed the top of the shaker.

'Peregrine, do you think those *are* dry enough?'

'They're the same as last time.'

'They never have been darling. Oh, well. For me, then; and one for Jane.'

'And there'll be Mamie,' he said, with a glance at the sofa.

'Why, yes, the poor thirsty thing! You must make a whole lot more, then. Once again, do you notice, no one has brought Priscilla?'

'Unless you hate a martini?' he interposed, handing Jane a glass.

'They are the end to her, really,' mused Lady Latterly. She released Jane in order to take a cocktail, with which she started to walk away. 'If she wants to know,' she said back over her shoulder, 'you might tell Jane who everyone is.'

If this *were* behaviour, one had yet to learn how to deal with it. Radiant foolhardiness was not going to carry one a'l the way—for one thing, gone was the magical aid of sunset: impassive electric candelabra sprang into brilliance round all the eggshell walls, and by their light Jane, instinctively looking down, saw those indelible ancient grass-stains betraying the embroidered hems of her muslin; which, till now not more than gracefully long for her, lapped on the parquet limply in an exposed way. Top to toe, she was being speculated upon, however abstractedly or politely, by Peregrine with whom she'd been left alone—momentarily, the misery of being thought artistic (for he would be sure to arrive at that) made Jane flush. She saw what it could be to lose nerve, and at the same time heard Antonia laughing. 'You're nothing,' she thought of the company, 'but a pack of cards!'—but the cards were stacked, and against her. The evening reeked of expense: everything cost, nothing was for nothing—Lady Latterly calculated the pretty penny, and everybody was being kept hard at it paying up. Nor did 'everybody' exclude Jane, who was paying by being the lovely nobody, exhibited but not introduced. Seeing this—in fact, on the whole stimulated because she saw it—she still was not sorry she had come. Let them take the consequences.

She had never drunk, only watched drinkers: inexpertly she stood holding the glass. With slow recklessness she raised the potion to her lips. The drink touched her lips, then began to go down well; she could soon amuse herself by rolling round the damp olive in empty mistiness. Glad to be disembarrassed of the martini, and at how small pains, she smiled as she handed him back the glass. 'You needn't tell me who anyone is; it doesn't matter.'

'No?' he said, disconcerted. 'No, I suppose not, really.'

'Oh, I expect it could,' she conceded, looking at him kindly.

'Vesta,' he said in extenuation, 'is still a trifle scatty after the Fête. She rather let herself in for that. It was quite a thing for her.'

'I remember fêtes at this castle when there was no one here.'

'This place,' he said, looking up at the ceiling, round the walls and even out of a window for Jane's benefit, 'I imagine, must have seen many changes.'

'Yes, it has. No one has stayed here long.'

'Let me give you another?' he said hastily.

'Yes, thank you. The olive will do again.'

'Old Terence, there—if you won't object to my telling you who he is?—remembers this place in the former gay days.'

'Which?' asked Jane, on the point of making a now experienced movement of glass to lips.

'Quite a time, I'm afraid, before you were thought of!'

'That would be true of any gay days,' she said composedly. 'But which?'

'Oh, you know; before it was 1914.'

'Which is Terence?' Having been shown, she walked away, carrying the cocktail.

This time, she came not so much towards the others as at them, with all the boringness of her youth. As a sensation, they had already had her: had she been a merely beautiful girl she could have been mortified by being simply the same dish come round twice—as it was, as implacably making a place for herself among them she sat down, she knew how far that was, or was soon to be, from the truth. She had invaded an open-yet-closed half-circle, orientated, by the habit of this country, towards the fireplace: tonight, because of the heat wave the grate was empty—in view of which, or rather to escape from the view of which, Lady Latterly would have done well to rearrange the room, but had not thought of it. The men, abandoning the certain loftiness they had had while standing, had lowered themselves—in all senses, Jane considered—into deep chairs; which rendered them, whether or not they liked this, almost supine before Lady Latterly and Mamie. For those two sat rearing spirally up, one at each end of the sofa once Mamie's only, each with her spine supporting a stack of cushions. Clearly there would be no notion of dinner till glasses had been refilled many times more—hard at it, the party were contradicting each other, some with passion, some with dogged authority, on a subject of which Jane understood little but that it had ceased to be the quite same for them all. A somewhat hopeless move to let the girl in, on the

part of the man who had taken it she was staying here, and in spite of everything still did so, was overruled by the others by closing ranks, and still more was disconcerted by the girl herself. For upon her other hand was old Terence.

She drank; then, keeping the stem of her emptied glass in balance between her two longest fingers, took advantage of solitude to study him. Only native other than Jane here, her neighbour reacted to her telepathy with a sort of uneasy, dodging, delaying half-glance out of the corners of his wetly bright, too-blue eyes. Alcohol, though he had a famous head, so quickly brought to the surface his Irish birthmarks that, even by this stage of the evening, one no longer could have mistaken him for the others—indeed how, it was to be wondered, could the girl have done so even at first? From the being out to the skin he was more florid. His exaggeration of his bravado, his brogue, himself was less exactly deliberate than he fancied—how much was acting, how much second nature? Vanity, guilt and sentimentality were at work in him, undiagnosed yet worked upon by the aliens. Bad enough having got himself in with this set without being detected by God's spy. 'Hey!' he said, 'what d'you look at me for?'

'Only, I wonder what you remember.'

Terence behaved like an old boy by attempting to beetle at her with one eyebrow, in an automatic, 'wait-till-you're-married' way. He then announced: 'The trouble is, I'm an old man.'

'That why I —.' She stopped, she hoped, just in time. Terence not having listened, did not take umbrage—chiefly, her anxious pause made him hope he had checked her, might yet give her the slip. He trailed his eye away, let it be caught elsewhere, and did the best he could to appear gone. Jane, however, soon gently recalled him. 'Can you, for instance, remember this house?'

'Why would I want to remember it, when I'm sitting here?'

'Years ago, I mean.'

Terence, leaning her way confidentially, said: 'Now don't *you* start having me on too, there's a dear good girl. By now there are too many years ago, and I'm getting sick to death of the whole bang lot of them—rotten old romancing and story-telling: you make the half of it up, and who's the wiser? What does it matter, anyway?—Yes, I daresay,' he had to add, with a gleam of lust, not for her, 'I *could* make you sit up, but then again I might not: nothing's much to any of you these days—is it now?' he asked, suspicious, measuring her. 'You can buy up a lot; you can't buy the past. What is it?—not even history. Goes to dust in your hand.'

'I don't buy,' she said, 'I have no money. Do you remember Montefort?'

'Montefort? Pity that place has gone.'

'But I live there.'

'Good God. What are you doing here, then?'

'I was asked.'

'She's a wonder,' quoth Terence, dallying with his tumbler, satirically thumbing the new cut glass. 'And you—fish out of water,

or not, eh?'

She only smiled and swept back her gold hair, as though by showing more of her face to show how little she had to fear from anyone—but the gesture, as answer, was unconscious. She continued: 'You were at Montefort?'

'Why not? That is to say, at one time.'

'When?'

'Now tell me this: who's your father?'

She told him. None the wiser, trying hard not to show it, he hazarded: 'I ever buy a horse off him?'

She said impatiently: 'No, I don't suppose so.'

'Well, I understood that place had got into farmers' hands.'

'Well, it has.'

He took another look at her.

'When were you most at Montefort?'

At that, Terence banged down his tumbler, and menaced Jane with the palm of a raised hand—he had the right to give her a sound slap, in default of which he smote an arm of his chair. 'Now it's no use trying to pin me down! When I say "one time," I mean the time I mean, and that's good enough.' He blustered away at her: 'I'm my own calendar.' Then his tone changed. 'Though I don't mind telling you this.' He looked warily round them, then leaned towards her: his features twitched. 'These days, one goes where the money is—with all due respect to this charming lady. Those days, we went where the people were.'

She drew a profound breath. 'My cousin Guy — '*

But Peregrine stood over her with the shaker; Jane held up her glass to be once more filled—at which Mamie could not but pop her eyes. 'These are powerful, you know—or perhaps you don't know?' she called across, direly waving the drink of which she spoke as she re-scrambled for balance among the cushions. Jane glanced at Mamie's pomegranate toenails, curling out of a sandal, but said nothing: the contents of the glass, which sip by sip became the contents of her, had no bearing whatever upon the situation that she could see. She experienced the absolute calmness, the sense of there being almost no threat at all, with which one could imagine fighting one's way down a burning staircase—there was a licking danger, but not to her; cool she moved down between flame walls. Only, all went to heighten her striking power—and had she not struck when she spoke the name! It had left her lips and was in the room.

Guy was among them. The recoil of the others—she did not for an instant doubt it was a recoil—marked his triumphant dis-

*Guy, former owner of Montefort, had been killed in the 1914 War. He had been the contemporary and first cousin of Antonia; who, still living, is Jane's patron. Jane, born years after Guy's death, has recently come upon and read a packet of letters signed with his initial.

placement of their air. She saw the reflection of crisis in each face, heard it in loudening, dropping then stopping voices. Dinner had been announced; but it was not, could not be simply that—the butler vanishing from the door had no more than offered an alibi or afforded cover for a single, concerted movement of disarray on the part of these poor ghosts on whom the sun had risen, to whom the cock crew. Lady Latterly moaned as she stood up; dissolution flowed through the chiffon and her limbs as she linked what was left of an arm through dissolving Mamie's. Jane herself rose, stood, the better to enjoy the spectacle of the flight, the glissade of the shadow-show, the enforced retreat from here to nowhere—but herself was caught in the mist of their thinning semblances. She tottered, was thankful to find her hand ensconced on the chimney-piece of eternal marble. She was right; there was one more figure among the men—all knew this; what were they waiting for?

Or might no man move till she raised the spell?

Lady Latterly, turning round in the doorway, said: 'Jane, my sweet, I *think* men want to come in to dinner! . . . What can you mean, Mamie?' she murmured, aside, askance. She billowed back in her tracks and scooped up the girl: three abreast, the ladies entered the dining-room.

'Why do I never have a butler who can count?' asked Lady Latterly, indicating, when they had all sat down, an empty place, laid, and an empty chair. 'Oh, no, though, I forgot: that was for Priscilla.—No, leave it, Duffy; but *do*, another time, count!'

'Are you sure he thought it was for Priscilla?'

'What can you mean?'

'Oh, nothing.'

'Oh I do hate your manner: don't be occult!'

'Why are you having it left, then?'

'What, that place? Because it was for Priscilla. To make you sorry.'

'As a matter of fact, Vesta, you never asked her.'

'Oh, that's so, so untrue!'

'Well, so Priscilla says.'

Peregrine interposed: 'I know there's a castle in this country where an extra place is laid every night for dinner. It's in some way connected with the family curse.'

'How do *you* know?'

Peregrine lost heart. 'You had a banshee, Terence?' he said hopelessly.

Terence, one side of the empty place, edged his chair first confidentially in to, then uneasily outward again from it; then began to spoon up liquidly-jellied madrilene at a great rate. The man on the other side found himself with no alternative to Mamie. She however, was busily reaching out, pulling out a rose from the centre bowl—leaning across her neighbour, she dropped the rose between the knives and forks of the empty place, saying '*There, darling! You're my ideal man.*' In the following pause the rest of the roses, outraged and candle-scorched, began to shed petals over the salted

almonds. Seated across the table, which was a round one, Jane faced the gap in the ring of lit-up masks.

'Duffy,' said Lady Latterly, 'take the roses away. They look second-hand.'

'Really, Vesta.'

'Well, Mamie keeps on awarding them.'

'Only one,' said Jane, who was seen to smile.

'Well, I can't stand Mamie being Lady Macbeth.'

'No,' Peregrine said, 'you've got this all mixed up with Ophelia.'

'Oh well, Ophelia; just as you like. I suppose you know Ophelia was raving mad?'

Mamie, hauling a velvet strap up a fat white shoulder, said: 'All I know is, I did a beautiful thing.'

Jane gave her the half-smile again.

Darkness rose to a height in the corners of the room; there were dimmed lamps over the serving-tables. Uncurtained windows stood open; breathless seemed the night, yet now and then a tremor ran through the candles each time causing a shadowed contraction of all faces. An owl was to be heard back in the woods; and the Irish butler, moving about, gave the impression of harkening for something more. Guy had dined here often.

A moth sheered the candles and fell scorched on to Mamie's rose—at which Terence's eyes consulted Jane's: unostentatiously putting a hand out he pinched the moth to death. Talk, which zig-zagged up to a pitch, stopped: everyone was aware of the old assassin wiping his fingers off on the sheeny napkin. The girl's odd bridal ascendancy over the dinner table, which had begun to be sensed since they sat down, declared itself—*she* was the authority for the slaying. Tolerating the tribute of the rose, she could not suffer dyingness to usurp: she let out a breath as the moth was brushed from the cloth. That done, she was withheld again. Her dilated oblique glances, her preoccupation less with eating and drinking than with glasses and forks gave her the look of someone always abstaining from looking across too speakingly at a lover—not a soul failed to feel the electric connection between Jane's paleness and the dark of the chair in which so far no one visibly sat. Between them, the two dominated the party.

Or, so they acted on barbarian nerves. In this particular company, by this time of the evening, even counterfeit notions of reality had begun to wobble. Who knew, who could now compute, to a man, exactly how many sat round the table? The evening offered footing to the peculiar by being itself out of the true—there was something phantasmagoric about this circle of the displaced rich. Reason annihilated itself when these people met. Together, they pressed themselves and each other to the extreme limits of their faculties: beyond what they were capable of lay what? They had warped their wits with disproportionate stories; at any turn the preposterous might lay final claim on them—there

was no censor. Even Shakespeare had stalked in. He and drink played havoc with known dimensions. There was a stir if not a kindling of exhausted senses, only now to be heated by being haunted; between the sexes there lingered on an amorous animosity, far spent. Mood had been dipping towards a vacuum; the camp lights sank—outside waited the stilly night. Had they been imaginative, had so much as one of them been a person at any other instant aware or keyed-up, they would together have made less apt conductors: as it was the current made circuit through them. Something more peremptory, more unfettered than imagination, did now command them—there *had* been an entrance, though they could not say when.

The men, within an inch of being outmanned, rallied. Mamie, having for some time given the impression that she had shot her bolt by that inspirational doing with the rose, sat up and took rather cosmic notice. Lady Latterly leaned across and, with the back of her fingers, delivered a flick or knock at Peregrine's wrist—negatively seated beside Jane he had scooped up petals and out of them had been composing a hieroglyphic on the lace cloth, for his own silently whistling and slightly frowning attention only. With a start, he acknowledged her taloned hand. The galante revival was signalled by a lifting of glasses, almost as though to drink a toast; and though one by one these were put down again, there remained the sensation that there had been a moment. There ensued a release of ardour and flattery, so that the two women, though set always back from the spot-lit Jane, could each queen it over new little subsidiary courts of love. In its own way, talk took a heroic turn—a recollection of acting as it could be, a glint of authority through bravery, a look of being back again on the mettle appeared on faces, making them less acquiescent and less opaque; it now was possible, looking round, to distinguish each man from the others by the revivification of some unequivocal quality he and he only had had when young. At the same time, while these men helped to compose Guy, they remained tributary to him and less real to Jane—that is, as embodiments—than was he.

Snapshots taken before Antonia was a photographer fused with the 'studio portrait' taken in uniform for Lilia, on the hall wall at Montefort (oak-framed, overcast by the flank of the stopped clock, all but secretively to be disregarded) and with what was inadvertently still more photographic in shreds of talk. Over the combination of glance and feature, the suggestion of latitude in the smile, rested a sort of indolent sweet force. Now more than living, this face had acquired a brightened cast of its own from the semi-darkness, from which it looked out with an easy conviction of being recognised. Nothing was qualified or momentary about it, as in the pictures: this was the face of someone here to the full—visible, and visible all at once, were the variations and contradictions, the lights and shades of the arrested torrent of an existence. Invisibly concentrated around him was all the time he had ever

breathed: his todays, his yesterdays, his anticipated to-morrows—it could be felt how and understood why something had emanated from him so strongly into the experience of the room when he joined the party. The set of his head was joyous and dictatorial—he was *at* the party, into it, key-placed in the zonal merging manly pattern of black-and-white round this round table. What yet was to be recognised was his voice—so expectant of it that she kept on all but detecting it, just not here or there, just not now¹ or then but at the same time everywhere and always, in extraneous overruling or underlying notes, tones, syllables, modulations in the now crowded vociferous general talk, Jane sat listening for it and to no other. She could not but know it when once she heard it, could not but hear it since it was to be heard, it could not but be to be heard since it would not be like him not to be talking. What remained beyond her was what he said—she had not the wits, at the moment, to take it in, even if it were to be sorted out. Her absorption—as from time to time, without raising her eyes, she recollected a glass and again drank from it or, putting out what seemed no longer to be exactly her own hand, played with a petal between her plate and Peregrine's—was solely in her sense of his being *here*. Here he is, because this is where I am. He had come to join her—join her, and on of strength of one invocation of his name! Before speaking it, had not the breath she drew been big with risk and exhilaration? The sound had gone out on to knowing air: had not the moment suffered as, with a shock, it took the charge of immanence and fatality? . . . And now? She must hope never in all her life again to be so aware of him, or indeed of anyone—for this was becoming so much too much for Jane, so giddy, as to be within an iota of being nothing. The annihilation-point of sensation came into view, as something she was beginning to long to reach. She began to wonder how it would be *to* look straight across the table. For, what continued to tell her that he was there dined in the knowing of why and how. Dominator of the margin of the vision, he was all the time the creature of extra sense. The face depended for being there upon there being no instant when it was looked straight at.

So, the resemblances to Antonia became more haunting because they could not be scrutinized. It was as though he, to speed up the coming back, carelessly had annexed from the cousin he counted sister some traits of hers, and was at once making use of them and subduing them. Or it could be that Antonia, left alone, had consoled or rebuilt herself by copying Guy, and that one now was in the presence of the original. The resemblance, nothing to do with feature, had come out in none of the photographs of Guy: it was an affair of mobility, of livingness—something to do, perhaps, with an interlock between the cousins' two ways of being, apart, yet one the cause of the other. Neither could be in abeyance while the other lived: he now tonight recalled Antonia, as she must often (had one known what was happening) have recalled him. His tenancy of her perhaps accounted for the restless mannishness in the woman she

was—and yet, no: for all her accesses of womanishness one could make a guess at the man she would have been, and it would have been a different man, not Guy. This was a question of close likeness (with everything psychic, emotional, perhaps fatal which such likeness could comprehend) not, for an instant, of identity. That the likeness should be a matter of look not looks, that it less declared than betrayed itself, like a secret history, made a deep-down factor of it—not least for Jane. The effect on her was to create a fresh significance for Antonia.

Torment caused the girl to look straight across.

He was gone. To mark this, at the same moment Terence, swaying sideways to give force to an argument, leaned a hand on the back of the empty chair. It was to be noted—and Jane did note, for she stared hard at it—how characteristic the old fellow's turned-up thumb was. Below it was gleaming, to her relief, the unhidden Chinese-chippendale pattern of the mahogany. She was free to entertain joy as not before: indeed she *saw* Guy now that she saw him gone. Not a vestige stayed on the outer air; she could therefore enter the full of seeing and knowing. That he had been with them, with her, was an unfettered fact—where is there perfection but in the memory?

The candles were burning some way down. How late was it? With lassitude a clock once again struck.

'I don't say so,' Mamie was saying, 'Priscilla says so.'

'Then heaven help her,' Terence was saying, 'the woman's wrong. The horse was looking at me last Friday.'

'Oh well, it will be all the same a hundred years hence, I daresay.'

'Now there *you're* wrong: you won't find a horse left.'

Mamie yawned: 'What dreadful things you say.' She stretched out, reclaiming the rose and tucked it into the tight top of her dress.

'Mamie won't even be there to find no horses,' said Peregrine, rousing himself suddenly. 'You might just be there,' he added, turning to Jane, 'but shrivelled up like a monkey, with black teeth. So why don't you make hay while the sun shines?'

She replied: 'I was making hay this morning.'

'Ah, then that *is* a hayseed in your hair.—May I?' Peregrine picked it out. 'How literal of you,' he said sadly, placing the seed on the cloth for Jane to study.

'Hello,' said Lady Latterly, 'what have you both got there?—What is it *now*?' she snapped at the butler, who had come and was waiting by her chair.

'If you please, m'lady, the young lady's cousin has come for her.'

'Why, when? Who's the young lady's cousin?'

'She gave no name.'

'Well then, bring her in then, for heaven's sake!'

'She'd prefer, she said, to stop at the door.'

'How very, very peculiar,' said Lady Latterly.

MARY LAVIN

LIMBO

“ — AND NAIDA WILL BE ABLE TO GO TO A PROPER SCHOOL—WITH girls of her own age,” said Edith Paston brightly, because both she and Alastair assumed that Naida, too, would be brokenhearted at leaving Africa. “We probably *did* neglect her education, and perhaps God saw that—and this is His way of remedying matters,” she said.

By “this”, Edith Paston meant a recent collapse of her husband, which had been followed by the prescription that they abandon their missionary work, and lead a less arduous life in a less arduous climate. And of course that meant going back to England.

It was when they mentioned England that Naida came to life.

England! In all her wandering with them, around the world, Naida had yearned for only one thing; a friend: a real friend, and where could such a friend be found but in England.

Only upon an English lawn, under English skies, and with a mild and beneficent English sun in the sky, could she imagine strolling, arm in arm, with a real true friend. What thought could one have of such things in Africa, passing quickly from one sun-baked hut to another over the scorched clay, and under the implacable African sun?

Oh, she loved the little black children. They were so gentle and timid. And she loved the little black babies. They were so comical with their little black bellies bulging out like melons. But she never could think of them as friends: real friends. It was all very well for Edith to say that in God's eyes we were all alike; that it didn't matter whether one's face was black or white: it was the soul that mattered. She knew that. And she knew, too, that when the waters of regeneration were poured over those little black heads, their souls, no less than her own, would shine like snow upon the mountain tops. But it didn't make a bit of difference. She still longed for an English friend. And now they were going to England!

But it wasn't as easy as the Pastons thought to get a place in the homeland. “Places”, as interpreted by Edith, seemed to have all passed into other hands, because what the Pastons were looking for was some place that was a bit delapidated, and could be had cheaply, but which could be restored, or made to resemble a gentleman's place.

It didn't seem an exorbitant demand to make, but the house-agents had nothing of the kind to offer them. It was really hard to believe they were doing their best, but one had to take their word for it.

There was nothing at all like that left in England, they said, although they were told that such places were still to be found in Ireland.

And so it turned out to be Ireland instead of England for the Pastons.

"It makes no difference really, Naida, I assure you," said her mother. "I can't understand why you're acting so oddly." Because Naida was absolutely dejected at the change in their plans. Edith couldn't understand her. What difference did it make? England or Ireland! They were all one, both parts of Great Britain. "Ireland is just another of the British Isles," she declared.

But at this point, Alastair felt compelled to be more accurate.

"Not any more, I'm afraid, Edith," he said. "Not nominally anyway."

"Oh, I had forgotten. How stupid of me," said Edith. "Your quite right, Alastair; it's no longer a nominal part of the Empire: but essentially things are the same, don't you think?"

"I suppose so," said Alastair.

It was only Naida who had misgivings.

And so, when they all arrived at the station of the small midland town in Ireland where they intended to settle and make their home, it was only she who felt conscious of the way people were staring at them.

"Oh, people always stare at newcomers," said Edith gaily, as she climbed into the station wagonette to drive through the town to their new home which lay at the other side of it.

And so, having confounded things from the beginning, Mrs. Paston entirely confounded the looks that were being bestowed on them as they were whirled on their way, she and Alastair sitting up straight as sticks in the front seat, and with her back to them, on the rumble seat, Naida, a rug spread primly over her knees and her yellow pigtails hanging docilely down to either side of her little pale face.

But Naida was right. Their like had never before been seen in Castle-rampart.

"They're Protestants," said Lottie White, a monitress in the school, who was just coming out of the school-house as they went past in the wagonette.

"How do you know?" asked her little sister.

"They have a Protestant look," said Lottie simply.

And everyone agreed, although no one could have been called upon to define exactly what constituted the difference between a Protestant look and a Catholic look. It was a matter of instinct.

"He looked very sickly though, poor man," said Lottie later, when she was discussing the new people with Mrs. Sully. "He must have spent some time in foreign parts; it's probably on account of his health that they've come to settle down here. I wouldn't say they had much money, though," she added, because her quick eye had taken in that the child's dress was faded either

from too much sun or too much of the wash tub, she couldn't say which, and, if she wasn't greatly mistaken, the lady's blouse was remarkably like a man's shirt that had been re-made, while her stiff straw hat had been unmistakably dyed at home, with a bottle of ordinary hat dye. "I caught the smell of it as they went past; it never wears off altogether!" she said, authoritatively.

But as Lottie discoursed idly about the appearance of the Pastons, there presented itself to her mind a matter that touched her more nearly.

What would they do with the child, she wondered? Where would she get her schooling?

"They'll hardly be able to afford a governess," said Mrs. Sully.

"I expect they'll teach her themselves," said Lottie, because somehow or other it had been inferred that before they retired the Pastons were teachers,—“teaching the blacks, of course,” said Lottie parenthetically, because she wanted to give Mrs. Sully to understand that that did not quite give them the same status as Lottie herself, “but they're probably competent enough to educate their own child.”

Quite so. Lottie White was something of a little consequence in the town, and so the matter of Naida's education was taken to be settled, and curiosity shifted to centre upon the repairs that were being carried out in the gloomy, stone house that the Pastons had bought, without having seen it, through an agent in London.

It had been vacant for some years, a great grey house, cheerless and damp-looking, standing half in the shade of a disused mill beside it, and half in the shade of its own dreary trees.

“Those poor people,” said Mrs. Sully. “I pity them from my heart. It would take a mint of money to make anything out of that old place.”

And yet, two weeks after the Pastons moved into it, it was hard to know which was the more astounding; how little had been done to it, or how vastly this little had altered the entire appearance of the place.

Only two, or at most, three trees were felled. The grass was scythed down. And the ramshackle laurels in front of the windows were cut back to the root. But oh, what light, and what air was let in upon the scene. For the rest, the gutters were cleaned, and the walls were scraped, and the doors and window-frames were painted white, and finally, over the front door, there flowered out a bright striped awning, red and white.

And lo! where the damp, neglected house had stood, there was a house, serene and graceful, a house in which life would clearly be conducted in a manner utterly different from anything hitherto experienced by the town.

And when Lottie White was passing by one afternoon, the three Pastons were seated on wicker chairs, under a big tree in the middle of the lawn.

“I suppose they were giving the child her lessons,” she said.

When, therefore, next morning, bright and early, Lottie saw Edith Paston coming across the school-house yard with Naida by the hand, she could not for a moment understand what had brought her there.

It took some time before Edith could make it plain why she had come.

Then all at once, Lottie understood, and her mouth fell open.

"But I thought you were teachers!" she cried, until, sensing her own crudity, she stammered a kind of apology. "I mean, that was what we thought you were doing—in those foreign places—teaching."

For a moment Edith stared. And then she laughed.

"Oh, my goodness! So that's what you thought! Why, of course we were teaching, but dear child, do you mean to say you didn't know what we were teaching? Why! what else but the Word of God: the Gospel, dear child."

Now, with Missionaries Lottie was more than familiar. Hadn't she a cousin who was going on the Missions!—But he was a priest! Never, never, had she come across lay missionaries! She stared stupidly at Edith, who laughed again, gaily.

"You dear child! You didn't think that we were secular teachers? Did you? Why, my dear, I cannot add two and two, truly I can't! And Alastair—that is my husband—is nearly as bad. We have a fair smattering of languages naturally, that is only to be expected! And we have, of course, given her—" Edith waved a hand in Naida's direction "—well, it isn't so much that we have given her lessons as that she has picked up the rudiments of a few languages: Asiatic for the most part, I'm afraid." Here Edith smiled disarmingly. "We never attempted anything else," she said. "In fact, we more or less relied upon local schools wherever we found ourselves. Even in Nairobi, the last place we were before we came here, although there had been some talk about drains and fever, we simply could not let her grow up illiterate, and so we took a chance and let her go to the native school." Edith raised her shoulders and dropped them again expressively. "Oh yes," she said, and this time she took Naida by the shoulders and pressed her towards Lottie. "We always send her to the local school." Her voice had become more crisp and decisive. "Do you want me to sign the roll-book, or anything of that sort?"

This, apparently, not being necessary, with very few more words. Edith took her departure, and left Lottie looking after her, with Naida by the hand.

This was a nice position! Lottie looked down at Naida. What was she going to do with her? In the class-room, prayers would be just beginning. She couldn't bring her in until after prayers.

But she couldn't leave her outside either.

"Come along!"

It was impossible not to be curt. Lottie led Naida into the narrow cloak-room, that was pegged around with wooden pegs for

the caps and coats of the scholars, and she began to unfasten her coat. As she did so she looked critically at her. Naida looked older than she first appeared. In her cap and coat, both of which were too small for her, she had only looked about eleven. In her dress, which was too long for her, she looked about fourteen.

"How old are you?" said Lottie.

Naida was thirteen.

"Hmm!" said Lottie.

"And what is your name?"

"Naida!" said Naida.

"Hmm!" said Lottie. That seemed to settle matters.

"Listen dear," she said, and she took down the blue coat again from the peg and began to poke Naida's arm into one of the sleeves. "In this school we begin and end the day with prayers, and we also have a short interval for prayer before and after lunch hour—"

Naida's eyes were so blue, so serious! Lottie White felt flustered.

"— and so," she said quickly, "if you like, you can go out into the yard and play until prayers are over, and we are ready to begin lessons, and," she said brightly, quickly, "on wet days you could sit here in the cloak-room."

But Naida stared so blankly, so uncomprehendingly, she lowered the coat.

"Don't you think it a good idea?" she said weakly.

Naida, it appeared, did not.

"I'd like to be present for prayers," she said.

Had she heard aright? Lottie White looked into the big blue eyes and then she spoke briskly.

"That may be, my dear child," she said, "but we must think of your parents. I'm sure it would not be their wish that you would remain. We wouldn't wish to displease them, you know."

But, firmly and definitely, Naida withdrew her arm from the sleeve of the coat.

"My parents would never be displeased with me for praying," she said.

"Oh?" Lottie was already nettled. She only became more so still. "Oh, very creditable," she said with asperity. "But you must remember that you belong to a different church from us, and that the prayers of your church are not the same as the prayers of our church. What's that?"

She didn't quite catch what Naida had said.

"What's that?"

"I said I don't belong to any church."

Two pink spots appeared on Lottie's dull cheeks. Was this a joke?

"Of course you belong to some church," she said sharply. "Everyone does. Everyone has a church; every Christian, I mean."

The pink spots glowed brighter. What was the child mumbling?

"What's that? Speak up!"

Naida raised her blue eyes, so mild, so sure.

"God had no Church," she said, "when He was on earth!"

Poor Lottie! This was altogether beyond her.

"You see, we are non-sectarian," said Naida.

This was altogether too much.

"We will not discuss the matter any further," said Lottie. She gave Naida a little push on the shoulder. "Please do as you're told. Go outside into the yard until Prayers are over. You will be called when we are finished."

The next moment Naida was given a glimpse of bench after bench of curious faces, as the monitress opened the class-room door and went through it, closing it with a little slam.

It was so disappointing.

She sat down in the dark little cloak-room and stared at the closed door, beyond which she could hear the sing-song voices of the scholars, rising and falling, but rising and falling in unison. And a feeling of loneliness far greater than any she had ever felt before came over her, and the tears came into her eyes. But she took heart again somewhat when a few minutes later she was called into the classroom and put between two girls who seemed exactly her own age. They were certainly very friendly, particularly one of them.

"My name is Mamie Sully," she said. "What is your name—your first name, I mean. I know the other."

But when Naida said her name, Mamie stared in some surprise.

"I never heard of a saint by that name," she said. Then she pulled herself up quickly. "I forgot you were a Protestant!" she said, and she looked her up and down with a renewal of curiosity. "I never had a Protestant for a friend before," she said. "Is it true you have an organ in your parlour?"

"It's only an harmonium, I'm afraid," said Naida.

But Mamie didn't seem to see much difference.

"Oh, I'd love to see it," she cried. "Can I come and see it after school?"

It was a bit abrupt, and Naida wasn't sure if Mamie was the right kind of girl she wanted for a friend, but that afternoon, Mamie presented herself at the Paston's place.

"Who on earth is this?" cried Edith, when she saw her coming across the grass, staring up at the windows, and craning her neck to see into the garden.

"Oh, it's a friend of mine," said Naida self-consciously, as she ran down to meet her.

Edith turned to Alastair.

"I suppose we can't expect to have much of a choice in a small town like this," she said, because after one glimpse of Mamie, she found it hard to adhere to her principle that it was only the soul that mattered. "I suppose it's alright if Naida herself is

satisfied," she said.

But was Naida satisfied?

If only Mamie had some attention to spare for her she would have been made satisfied. But Mamie stared so at everything, and not only that, but she kept on taking up things and handling them.

Poor Mamie! When had she ever seen anything like the Paston's room.

"And this is the drawing-room?" she said dubiously, at one stage in her investigations, as she came to a pile of books that went from the floor to the ceiling. "We have a lot of old books too," she said, "that belonged to my grandfather, but they're kept up in a loft over the stable!"

She wandered over to the mantelpiece.

"What's this?" she cried, taking up an elephant bell, and then a lump of jade. "What's this? What's this—?"

Naida could hardly keep pace with her.

"That's a straw effigy," she said, as Mamie picked it up. "The natives made effigies—"

But Mamie's attention had darted to something else, and she was peering incredulously at what seemed to be—yes—she touched it gingerly—it was a lump of clay. In the drawingroom!

"Oh that—?" Naida put out her hand impulsively to protect it.

But Mamie had just caught sight of the harmonium. Until that moment she had forgotten all about it, although it was that she had principally come to see. There it was: like people said, standing in a corner just like an ordinary piano. For a minute Mamie gaped in astonishment. Then she recovered.

"Can you play it, Naida? I'd give anything to know how. What do I do?" Essaying first one stop, and then another, and feeling for the pedals with her feet, she was aglow with excitement. "I'm no good at the piano: I haven't the patience to practise, but I'd love to play the organ—it is a sort of an organ, isn't it? I bet I'd be good at it. What do I do next? Is this right? Oh, listen to me: listen to me. I knew I'd be good at it!" She laughed. Then she stood up.

"Well, I must be off," she said.

But on the way out of the room, she paused beside the small table on which she had seen the lump of clay earlier in her visit.

"Well! I never!" she said, staring at it. And as she seemed about to pick it up, Naida caught her arm.

"We'd better not touch it, I think," she said politely using the plural pronoun, because she was so pleased with her friend's interest in it. "It's a fossil," she said, "—or rather, it's the piece of stratum in which a fossil was found," she amended scrupulously. "I was with father when he found it," she went on eagerly. "It was a leaf, a fern-frond to be exact—and oh, it was so beautiful. But of course, we sent it to the British Museum—Father says one can't be selfish about these things. They wrote ever such a nice

letter—we have that too somewhere—and they said that the fossil came away so easily from the stratum that they were sending it back to us—the stratum I mean—and this is it!” Cupping it as lightly as if it were a living thing, she lifted the piece of clay in the palm of her hand. “It’s almost as good as having the fossil itself,” she said. “You can see the marks of the veining distinctly if you bend your head.”

But Mamie didn’t bend her head. She raised her eyebrows.

“I know what my mother would do with it!” she said, and she went out of the room.

A little disappointed, Naida followed her.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” she said shyly, as she opened the hall-door.

“Oh yes, at school,” she said, then.

But even at school, the opportunities for cementing their friendship were greatly minimised by the fact that Naida always went home earlier than the other girls. At twenty minutes of three every day, a single figure, blushing and self-conscious, she had to fasten her satchel and stand up and go out of the room, while the others, flopping down on their knees, remained behind for prayers. She was always half-way home across the fields when at last they tumbled headlong into the school-yard.

“Poor Naida, she misses all the fun,” said Lottie White, when Naida was about a week at school, as she looked after her, a solitary figure, almost out of sight. “I’m always sorry for Protestants,” she said, and she sighed sadly.

“Why did she say that?”

When the monitress was gone, the children crowded together in the school-yard. But vaguely they had begun to guess what was in Miss White’s mind. Only one of the very littlest of them ventured to put their fears into words.

“Does she mean Naida won’t go to Heaven?” she whispered.

Although it was only a frightened whisper, all over the school-yard there was a sudden aghast silence. And in the silence, one or two of the older ones noticed that the shadow of the great grey block of the schoolhouse had moved closer to them.

“Does it?” cried the little child, her voice shrill and urgent.

But no one was prepared to answer.

“But she won’t go to Hell!” cried the child. “Good people don’t go to Hell!”

That was so!

They stared at each other, and then their eyes flew across the field to where Naida was just visible still, a small speck at the far end of the field, about to cross a stile that would take her out of their sight.

The winter sun was not yet near the horizon, but large clouds massed on the rim of the sky, threatening to bring the day to an end earlier than usual, as the schoolhouse and the neighbouring

church had already brought the blue shade of evening over the school-yard. On the stile, where Naida stood, poised for a moment, however, the sun fell unimpeded in its full afternoon glory, and it gilded her small figure, making her pigtails glow, and making the buckles on her satchel shine.

It was preposterous to think that Naida's soul should have its destination in any darksome place.

Oh, how the children wished they had not lingered in the schoolyard, but had gone straight home, as they were always told to do. On their shoulders they felt the chill of the shadows; under their feet the asphalt was cold; they were tired and hungry. They thought, too, of the long tasks that faced them for homework, and they wished desperately to disperse. Naida, however, was now out of sight, and in the far field, where they had glimpsed her, the sunlight fell only on the tops of the willows by the mill-stream, and upon the upper spokes of the old mill wheel.

And then, suddenly, the littlest of them spoke up again in a shrill voice.

"What about Limbo?" she said.

Limbo! They had forgotten about Limbo. Oh, how their burthened hearts lightened, and how their minds were eased. There was no need after all to prognosticate darkly about Naida; she could be consigned to Limbo. And they could go home untroubled. Not that they understood very clearly the what or whereabouts of Limbo. Never before had they known anyone in the least likely to go there. Heaven and hell were the familiars of every day. To the one or the other everyone in the town would one day be despatched. But never, never, never had they known anyone likely to go to Limbo: until now. And as they went their separate ways homeward, they tried to keep her out of their thoughts, poor Naida: now more than ever, remote and single.

MATT THE DRUM

THERE IS NO ONE I CAN HURT NOW BY TELLING THIS. NOT NOW. For though only one is dead, the other three are so far in their private wildernesses that they are beyond hurt from me. For them there is no returning, any more than for The Scut. Stella will not come here again, Stella, who under our roof knew public catastrophe and private horror. Matt, whispering his incessant apologia, is too busy to speak to us. My father has turned back, as the old and deserted do, to the unchanging values of his youth, and sits reading *Castle Rackrent*, while on the other side of the fire I sit typing.

Does this annoy you, father?

Eh? No, Bob, no. Don't mind me. I don't hear it.

Thrusting the open book between his outstretched legs, he begins to fill his pipe, looking down at the pouch as he tips some tobacco into his hollowed palm, then staring into the fire as he works the shredded tobacco with the strong, dry fingers of his left hand. I watch the ritual movements of his hands, which are like his life—vigorous, competent, and unbeautiful. Every evening, in the total stillness of a country winter's night we sit thus and I do not try to talk. I am here, that is all. Perhaps it is something. For it seems to me that everything in my father's life, except the farm and life itself, has withered away from him. He stands like a solitary tree, condemned by its integrity to live alone. He must know that soon, one day now, I shall be away again.

We do what we can, said a sighing neighbour, and our best is but little.

I do not think so. We do what we must and have no choice. The heart's commotion seethes over and only afterwards can the mind examine the data and make its useless report. Perhaps I am magnifying the disaster that embraced us all. Disaster, like triumph, is a part of living. Men do violence to each other every day. The balance of impulse and judgment lurches at an unforeseen moment to become forever unbalance.

Unforeseen I am sure that word lives in my father's mind as persistently as in mind.

Why did we not foresee there were signs enough. But how could I, as a boy, understand that Matt's crooked body, his explosive speech, his immoderate devotion to us, his almost orgiastic sense of emergency were apt for tragedy? How could I think, every time I played a trick on The Scut or merely

forgot Stella, that I was diminishing them, increasing the ineptitude that drove them into furtive ways?

Or perhaps, in the reaches of the mind that are said to be prescient, I did know. Perhaps the slights, sneers and tricks that The Scut suffered from me at school made up the total score I had to set against that one outrageous rape by which he became forever my conqueror. And if I ignored Stella, it may have been that in the unreason of the blood she was already my woman, too close for remarking. How assentingly she would have trotted beside me in my wanderings, bivouacking without complaint, eating at any hour, in any place, a desireless companion, softening the silence with her downy quiet. Her ability to sit quiet without humming or knitting or asking questions, the slender plumpness of her, sleek as a young bird's, her very anonymity—these are the merits I think of now, when I shall never see her again, and my father and I live alone in desolate comfort.

Since I have come home I have had leisure to study the case of each one of us in relation to the event, reflecting long upon the position of each and its special vulnerability, as if we were pieces on a chess-board. It is clear to me that if I had not gone away none of this would have happened. For if I had been willing to stay and farm, Stella would not have consented to marry The Scut. She would have married me. The Scut would be alive to-day. Matt's life would be unchanged and my father could hope for grandsons. It is startling to look at that image of lost innocence and very sobering to think of our tragic interdependence. Yet it was my father, in that distant careless hour when he begot Matt upon some servant-girl, who created the instrument which was to wound his household and his neighbour's. We betray and are betrayed; we are all guilty and all wounded. For we have all in some way failed to live, forsaking the easy balance of childhood's give and take without reaching the strong compensations of adult life. We live in silence, or in a welter of accusing voices.

But if I return again and again to the view-point that my father is the most wounded, it is partly because he is inexorably sane and can assess his losses, and partly because in his case no single tragedy came to burst a bank within him and give him, even momentarily, the release of a great emotional experience. His heart must have gone slowly dry in an attrition of hope as he watched one project after another wither and fail.

My mother's death before she could give him a second child: the sombre years that followed when only an elderly man, a small boy and a crippled servant-man inhabited the house; the six months' marriage with Stella's mother, a woman I scarcely remember, for I was then at Blackrock College; after her death, a new, uneasy pattern of living, different, but no more satisfying than before; in addition to a brooding son, a frightened step-daughter; quiet everywhere in the high, empty rooms and almost unbroken silence at the long dining-table; surely my father, however un-

imaginative, must have come to believe in a blight on the house, some prohibition annulling the accomplishment of his normal desires. In those years the only gay voice raised in the house was Matt's, for Matt was garrulous and unafraid, much more at ease with my father than I. He would accompany him across the yard and pursue him into the house, slithering and drumming beside him, while he chronicled with gusto the minuscule annals of the farm.

God, did you see the new potatoes? Did you ever see them better? I'll give my oath you couldn't beat them. I wouldn't say John Corkery had potatoes the like of them! You couldn't beat them! I'll say you couldn't beat them. God, do you know I wouldn't care what I had to eat if only I had a feed of new potatoes

They've caught him the boyo was lifting the chickens, they caught him over above in Ballyboley and he at the same tricks, God, if I'd a caught him I'd have broken every bone in his body

We'll be done altogether if the rain doesn't stop this week, isn't it above three weeks it's raining now and Michael says there'll be no harvest at all in these parts if it doesn't stop and the corn in the third field the half of it's lodged, what'll we do if we can't cut it, what'll we do? Michael says ther'll be no harvest if there's no harvest weather and the rain coming down you'd say it was out of a spout the past three weeks

Above his deformed body, the burst red cheeks, prominent eyeballs and fleshy lips gave an impression of gross vitality. His surgical boot drumming briskly on the flagstones beat a *rat-a-plan* of bucolic industry. He was committed and happy. I, the son of the farm, was miserable. I carried the burden of a secret that seemed to be swelling and obtruding an insistent life of its own. This illegitimate secret, I had not chosen or desired it, any more than one desires hunger. Some day, and soon, I had to tell my father that I would not farm, that I wanted only to paint, that I must paint, and that he must give me the money to make it possible. It was impossible to say this and it was imperative to say it.

When I did say it, nothing happened, nothing at all.

He had been sitting filling his pipe after dinner. He stood up, shaking the crumbs of tobacco from his waistcoat, and moved to the window, where he stood for a long time looking out, patting the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe with his little finger. I stood with the dining-table between us, looking at his back and at the narcissi stretching their necks from a glass vase on the table. Their amazed white faces gave form to the shock that filled the room.

My father showed no anger and said very little on that occasion. I got out of the house and out of sight. Standing in the back lane under the wild cherry, with the cold glitter of the April sunshine and the promise of life all around me, I thought of the

deep lines on my father's face when he turned round, and wondered if I had given him his last and sorest wound.

Sometimes I think that fortitude is my father's chief quality. At other times I think he has become invulnerable through doing constantly the thing he must do. He is now seventy-eight and is still giving deep consideration, prudent calculation, and all his waking hours to the further improvement of this farm. In the autumn he laid down a new orchard as if he were planting for a long line of inheritors. I care little who buys my paintings, and perhaps he cares little who comes after him. It may be that a man who can live thus has moved out of the range of tragedy. When my thought slips away from him, back to those of my own generation whose predicaments became disaster, it is of Matt that I think most nearly.

Matt the Drum brought me up in a fashion, kept me from falling into the pond, showed me how to make and set a rabbit snare, gave me all his simple lore until my skill and knowledge outran his. Then, from being my protector and instructor he became, first my accomplice in schoolboy evasions and ambushes, and finally my unquestioning follower.

I was seven years old or thereabouts when I said to my father at dinner one day:

Matt is my brother. Isn't he, daddy? Isn't he?

Who told you that?

Nobody told me. I made it up myself. I love Matt.

That's all right. But you are not to say that he is your brother. Do you hear?

I won't, daddy. I never—

And if you hear anyone saying the like of that, tell me and I'll put them from ever saying it again.

I will, daddy. I will. I NEVER—

That'll do. No more talk out of you now. That's a good boy.

Meals in the dining-room were frightening to a small boy, the big silver forks too heavy for a small fist, the enormous expanse of shiny damask almost at eye-level, and a grave, elderly father sitting far away on the other side, always gentle and never gay. Life began again when you climbed down and rushed out to the yard and saw Matt slither-hopping to meet you and shouting, urgent as usual:

I thought you was never coming, what kep ye, come *on*, I got something to show ye

In adolescence I began to be curious about Matt's origin and association with us. Matt was the servant-man, eating in the kitchen and sleeping in a small room on the ground floor, but there was no doubt he had privilege. He had no assigned duties and he showed remarkable freedom of speech with my father. I rejected the interpretation that my father, frustrated in his patriarchal instincts, was bestowing on a crippled retainer the consideration he

might have given to wife and children. The early mode of fantasy was to imagine that my mother was a 'fallen' woman, that my father had reclaimed her by marrying her and that Matt was the fruit of her sin. This yielded to a theory that Matt's birth might be connected with the departure of one of my father's sisters at an early age for the Continent, where she had remained, living in pagan and presumably wicked freedom. The theory withered for lack of nourishment, as it proved useless to attempt conclusions from my father's elliptical reminiscences. I was a man before I could see my father as a youth like myself, and reflect that he had surely not remained celibate until his marriage with my mother at the age of fifty. By that time I had begun to paint and no problems unrelated to painting remained. When I thought of Streamstown, I saw a small, distinct view of my father and Matt moving about the farm, as if I were looking at them through field glasses.

Of Stella I did not think at all.

In Stella, who upon her mother's death had become the one woman in a house of three countrymen, I, as a boy, saw nothing but ignorance and ineptitude. She could drive a car, but she could not harness or ride a horse, she had to be taught how to work the incubators, she had never seen butter made, she could not cook partridge, her tarts and soda-bread were sad, and she was afraid to walk down the drive in the dark.

My father bore her inefficiency as quietly as he bore my defection. Matt, who must have suffered from my absence, (I think of this only now) ran errands for Stella, protected her from the fierce gander who terrified her, helped her with the incubators, and taught her, in his fashion, how to look after the young turkeys, magnifying every difficulty, so that with his help she might triumph over them. He made her the light of his life and the reason of his being. I write this soberly. Matt, an illiterate and crippled bastard, had seen in one blinding moment the thing he had to do and was content. His capacity for immolation had been nursed through carefree years until the hour when it became clear to him that he and no one else would do. In that magnificent moment, the world, our world, was his to control and set right, and I am sure that under his murderous thumbs the years of dependence were expunged. I would like to think that Stella understands this too, but I do not think that Stella is formed for understanding. It is enough that, like a terrified cat released from a rabbit snare, she has raced away to freedom.

I was in Madrid when my father's letter came telling me that Stella was going to marry The Scut.

The Scut !

For two days I could not paint.

Scut Hennessey, dyspeptic and dismal, badgered at school, always sick at parties, a fellow who had managed to get himself badly bitten by my father's old sheepdog, who looked like a groom and could not manage a horse

At the end of two days I began to reflect that this was not my business. Nothing at Streamstown was my business any longer. Weeks passed. I did not answer my father's letter or write to Stella. I moved to Pasajes, where I found life cheap and good and went on painting. It was much later, months later, when money began to run short, that I wrote to my friendly agent in Paris, hoping that some of my work had been sold, and received with his reply, a packet of letters. He had not, he explained, forwarded them to Madrid, having received no answer to a letter of his own.

I read my father's letters ; and whatever remained of childhood in me died then. The tiny, clear image of an unalterable pattern of familiar country life was muddled over and gone ; when I looked now I saw only the colours of violence.

Stella had not married The Scut. A week before the date of the wedding the postman, crossing the Stepping-Stones in the early morning had found The Scut face downwards in the stream that formed the boundary between his land and ours. He had not been drowned. He had been strangled and thrown into the water. The mark of Matt's built-up boot was in the mud beside the stream, and Matt had been arrested and tried for manslaughter. He was found guilty but insane, and had been committed to an asylum. Stella had gone to relatives in Scotland. My father was alone.

I went home at once.

Harvest was over. Fruit trees were being planted in the paddock where I had learned to ride. New buildings were going up in the outer yard. My father looked as I remembered him. Now it is March and I have spent the winter here. In the first few weeks my father talked a little of Matt.

How did Moloney make a case for insanity?

Physical, mostly. The injury to his spine. Michael here gave evidence that Matt had stopped talking to people and went about muttering. And then his behaviour during the trial helped. Wouldn't speak—the lad that talked all day! And the lack of motive. A sort of brain storm.

What do you think about that?

My father gave me a sharp look.

What do you think I think? Matt loved this house, loved you and me ; he wouldn't bring trouble on us for nothing. If Matt choked the life out of The Scut, you may be sure he had a good reason

There was a very long pause.

You see, said my father in the quietest voice I have heard him use, it was premeditated

What do you know about it, father?

Nothing ; except this ; the print of Matt's boot was found beside the Stones ; but I happen to know—and maybe no one else does—that Matt didn't ever cross by the Stones ; it was too awkward for his boot. He had a way of his own further down in the

bottoms. If he was at the Stones, he went there on purpose to meet The Scut when he'd be going home from spending the evening with Stella.

I went to see Matt. He did not return my greeting ; the fleshy, eager lips were parted as if to speak but no words came. His red face looked as if something was arrested and settled there, as if his vitality was slowly congealing. After a prolonged stare his head swung sideways, his glance became oblique, and I think he forgot me.

That was the first visit. I have kept no diary of the visits and I do not know how many times I had already been, on the day when Matt began to mutter—a thick, explosive mutter like his speech. Matt—the boy whose loud, thoughtless voice had gone like a clapper all day at Streamstown—Matt began to speak in undertones of his secret life. At these times, on these visits I kept still and used my memory. I have made from memory a sort of précis of his circular monologue, keeping his phrases, but omitting repetitions and expletives. As a document it has no value. Anyone who reads it can say that it is my invention, perhaps even a forged 'confession.' To you, who do not know my family, it is fiction. When you read it you will understand why there is no more to say to my father, why I do not write to Stella, why Matt is silent. Here it is.

My lovely darling. My lovely darling. Lying in the pocket of my mind like a gold watch. I could look at her all the time unbeknownst to anyone. That's all I wanted. To look at her. To see her moving about. Sometimes she'd smooth the pillow with her smooth little hand. I under her hand and she smoothing me. I wasn't Matt the Drum then Sometimes she'd sit before the glass and commence to brush her hair. I wouldn't miss the time passing, I'd never know the hour of the night and I flattened in the ivy. And herself soft and neat like a wren in its nest. It's away in another place she is now. That's it. That's it. That's how it is. I done that. I put him from touching her. Matt the Drum. And I'd do it again. I would. I put him from lying with her. He'll never lie with her again. Never. My lovely darling

MARY BECKETT

THREE DREAMS CROSS

ALL THE LONG YEARS SINCE EVA WAS BORN SHE HAD LISTENED TO talk of the sun. For those eighteen years she had lived in a land that was worn and grey ; where the clay was cold so that no flowers grew. On warm days the rain trailed a limp veil over the fields. It adorned cobwebs intact with beads but streaked Eva's hair in wisps against her damp cheeks. On wild days the wind scudded tattered clouds over the mountains and sulphur-shaded seagulls were torn wailing diagonally across the sky. On cold days the air was ponderous, forbidding, confining. But there were times in the summer when the clouds in the south turned deep dark red and the dull flat sky caved and glowed pink and lilac and green in still unreality. It was then that those who had travelled talked of the sun.

They told of the high blue skies with white woolly clouds, and white roads and yellow fields whispering, expectant. They had drunk of sharp sparkling water, kneeling on stones warm under their touch. They had lain against the shadowy prickle of haystacks and licked sweet sun dry juices from their lips. It brought all light and life to the world, they said. And they sighed.

As Eva grew older such talks gave rise to a tingling unease in her body. She confided in no one and her eyes were dark and guarded with their secret. Her head swung back and her fingers stretched and then curved with desire to yield herself to this power she would find elsewhere.

At first the light was elusive, long shimmering lanes of light through emptiness. Breathless when the beam caught her, nervous in the blackness it left in its wake, Eva travelled alone on the train. It stopped in the morning at a white-washed station garnished with orange nasturtiums where the breeze twirled willow leaves silver side up measling the white path with their shadow.

There were few people, but those that there were had a look of such sweet contentment that Eva took heart and stepped boldly out, into the sunshine. A horse whinnied over the gate and little lightnings played on its glossy skin. It ran, tossing its arched mane when Eva came near and because the animals at home were heavy-hooved and docile she laughed, and the laughter rolled richly in her throat. The lane she went down was pink underfoot and it led through the yard of a farmhouse, where amid flocked chickens and ducklings, wobbling calves and young turkeys sat a solemn pink, fat baby in a playpen. Inside the house a woman was singing.

Eva hurried through for fear of trespassing, confident in this

place she too would build life as joyous and peaceful as theirs. Happily she gathered ragged handfuls of flowers that had no perfume but the sharp tang of green growth. She knew no names for them; there would be a time for learning names. When the lane dipped over a hill and the sea came in sight delight was born in her. Her heart grew and absorbed her being into its throb so that she was shaken into opening wide her arms. Her flowers lay among the tangle of bracken and bramble that banked steeply above the stony bay where beside a tarred shed two men shook out nets. The bright-skinned sea wrinkled against red rocks below her, and miles out a hazy hilly coastline received a boat that was nothing but a tail of smoke. Excited, she walked through the wilderness that parted breast high to let her pass and rubbed caressingly kittenwise against her ankles.

Finding herself sleepy in a level field, she rested and the sun painted gold on a wave in her hair and sought out the blue skin under her eyes and freckled it. When she awoke a black crow perched on each salt-bleached post in the twisted fence and the sky was dimmed.

Eva ran for shelter and hunkering listened dismayed to the pigeon-wing rattle of rain through the sycamore leaves. When the sky was drained pale Eva wandered through deserted fields where grain drooped heavily. Under a bush she found red rose petals lying soaking on the ground and on the trunk of an oak tree an ash leaf smeared, yellow. From this place too, she concluded, the sun had gone. And bolting hope outstripped fortitude. She would go farther south.

As the night grew in heat the stars grew in size and brilliance making those of the north paste pinsized diamante. Eva's head leaned stickily against hard leatherette and she watched a long narrow man with a jerking throat pillow on his arm the head of his fat little wife with a greedy mouth. Opposite two girls stained with orange juice lolled on each other's shoulders. In the darkness, a loudspeaker droned the names of deserted concrete stations.

The sun rose and glared down on drab olive and parched red soil. Withering pink flowers hung in crumpled tumbling flounces against limed walls. New lines formed overnight in Eva's face were covered with salty dust and her lips felt thick and dry. She waited patiently for a glimpse of the sea, hoping for a salty spray of green-grey, strong and clean and cold. A hot blue spiritless expanse excited the two orange-stained girls to raise tired lids and mutter: "There's the sea. It won't be long now." But it was a purgatory of shuffling corridor and hot bodies touching and recoiling. A basket scratched the smarting groove at the back of her knee and only globular tears would have rid Eva of her unreasoning disgust.

She struggled through white streets of screeching cars in and out of pockets of smells of garlic and bread and rubber and

peaches down to the sand. One patch, beside smashed concrete, was free and dirty. The sand burned where she walked. A hook-nosed man with white teeth and rings in his ears jangled tin bracelets under her eyes and spat when she shook her head. "Photo?" A strutting youth wielded a camera uncaring for even commission so bored was he, until he leaned near the tanned skin and bleached hair of a governess neglecting the naked tadpole of a child splashing in the water. Nearby, a girl smoothed oil on her back, too late, and ruffled a huge blister. A man with a laugh pulled the broken skin, tearing off a white strip and underneath was raw. She bowed her head on her knee and his offending hand refused to soothe and protect it. He smoked his cigarette until a small smouldering butt remained, which he flung at her feet.

A slight untidy disturbance among the people resolved itself. Faggotted together they moved towards an old walled town, compact and close, higher up on the dark green hill. Group by group they dropped away in the white town into the blue cool behind swishing bead and chain screens. No more than a few, far ahead of Eva plodded on to be swallowed up by the grey gates. By the time Eva arrived they had vanished, and the town was asleep, lulled within some thick-walled rooms by a boy who sang to a guitar. His sweet clear voice rose high above the narrow streets, but the strumming scooping sobbing of strings was caught quivering in the sour heat.

There was no shade; there was no space in the town for trees or green of any kind. Steep stony streets clenched themselves grimly round the church. A patter of sharp pebbles dislodged by Eva's stumbling echoed with a man's loud curse upstairs in a shuttered house. Placards indicated cellar cafes, but hunch-backed stone steps hid them from her. The church would give her rest, she thought climbing to the dome of the town. It would be dark inside and after touching tepid water in a stone bowl the lamp-lit flicker of wine-red would eclipse the holocaustic sun. She closed her eyes, for the doors, thick brown wood, were closed, barred with black iron hot on her fingers.

There were ten steps to go down, grey steps. One had to be careful sometimes with steps when there was nothing to hold. She put her foot nicely in the centre of the step and leaned on it experimentally. It did not feel the stone and yet it must have been firm for she remained balanced. She brought the other after it, stiffly from the thigh. An old woman cackled derision, or perhaps an old man; it is hard to tell in old age. It was hard to keep count when her feet were divorced from her brain, but it was important for if she lost one she would fall and the noise would startle more angry voices.

Safe again on the level of the little square she saw an open door. It was white with a graceful cut-glass knocker and handle and beyond was a white marble hall with a green glass roof and a

curving flight of stairs. A window opening on a black iron balcony in the rampart wall looked down on the terraced hill and the white town and the sea. There, a chugging boat with a brown sail stretched as a parasol over the deck neared two wooded islands. Eva went towards it, dazzled by black and white squares on the floor. There was no breeze through the window but the extent of dark green and hazed blue invited her. Before she could reach it, however, a dark girl, thin, tall and smiling pulled venetian blinds with closed slats and the light was blocked.

"I wanted to see out," Eva said petulantly.

"Then why did you come in?" the tall girl retorted.

"The sun was so hot. I was looking for shade."

"Well now you're in shade there is no sense in looking out at the heat." We are like small children bickering, Eva thought and she said: "I am over eighteen."

The tall girl laughed, "Not a good age to be caught in the sun," she said and her brown eyes were empty of reflection although her teeth shone white in the shadow of the blind.

Eva's interest flagged. There was no chairs in the hall. Two ping-pong tables, a piano and some potted palms were small in its vastness. The dark girl chanted: "You are heartsick and heatsick and homesick and travelsick." Then, she added, "But you are safe. No one will touch or come near you. That intense cold isolates you know: so does great heat." Eva sat on the floor against the wall, but as her feet had refused to feel the church steps so her back and her legs felt no contact with the marble and tile that should have been cold. Her finger-tips testing it felt dust only.

"You came on a holiday alone," the dark girl scoffed. "You sought adventure!"

"I sought the sun."

"And you found the sun."

"And I fled the sun," Eva said sadly. "I will go out. I will go back to the sea, perhaps, or to the lovely place I left yesterday where the sun was a benison. Or even back to the cold grey skies and deep winds of the place I was born." She did not stir, though, and the dark girl put her hands on her hips, tightly encased in back cotton and laughed again. The whole white vault of the staircase echoed her laughter. Then Eva struggled to her feet and the noise was cut off like a break in transmission. The poised in ridicule.

A man's voice at Eva's elbow startled her although it was brown glazed eyes watched although the head and hands were still placatingly soft. "Mademoiselle wishes to stay here?" His hands were spread; he leaned forward.

"I do not wish to stay here," Eva said and the words, formed slowly, were unsure.

The man's face was kind, but questioning:

"What can I do to help?" he asked.

"If I could get back to the station," she said.

"Ah my dear Mademoiselle there are no trains," he lamented. "It is too late now, and you have no money. You would be uncomfortable at the station. You have just come. You must stay," he coaxed. Eva had no answer to give. For the moment she could not cope with the mysterious weight that dragged her. She moaned, shocking herself. "It is so silly," she said resolutely. "I am not a child," and the dark girl shouted for the third time. Even the man's eyes glinted mockingly so that Eva was confused, unable to decide whether they thought her young or perhaps too haggard to have any question about it. "It does not matter," she persisted. "I wished to say that I should be old enough to bear disappointment. That is all I have suffered."

"Disappointment at this temperature has been known to kill people—of your age," the girl said, running her thin tongue-tip over her lips. The man gesticulated irritation and she walked, flatly in her espadrilles to the green table where she bounced interminably the brittle boast ball.

In a moment the staircase and then the hall were thronged. Two boys played the piano and its syncopation competed against the steady rhythm of the dark girl's ball and the scattered rattle of bats. A big negro in sponge-soled shoes squelched across the floor, chuckling as he tossed a thick red wool jersey round his shoulders. "He comes from the Gold Coast," the secretary informed Eva. "The Gold Coast" she echoed; it sounded the promise of all she desired. He smiled condescension. "My dear Mademoiselle, the Gold Coast is not for you. Your skin is too thin for the sun. You have come too far south for our days. You will find serenity in the beauty of our nights." He bowed and left her. A wicker chair was pushed up against her. She dropped into it. It creaked. She slept.

When she awoke the night had come. Light from a crystal dropping chandelier was a white pool on the marble but it hollowed the secretary's face with shadow so that the little sagging puffs of his cheeks looked old. "Now you are rested," he said, "you will be able to go upstairs and admire the night. The darkness is heady like wine." He laughed. "You understand that I speak like the guide book. But it is your reward after your long journey and your disappointment. There are three flights of stairs and then you will find a balcony which will be yours alone. The stairs are tiresome but you are young and perhaps strong. Remember you will have a long rest when you have reached your room."

Eva propped her head on her hands because it was dizzy and motes like mosquito clouds swirled in front of her eyes. "Why should I climb three flights of stairs to find darkness. I have lived in darkness and semi-darkness for eighteen years. I want light." He shrugged. "You left the light. You were impatient with the ways of the north and you refuse to suffer the ways of the south.

You have no further right to the sun. Resign yourself to the night." He turned on his way out to add, smiling: "There will be a moon, if you're good."

Her body's relief at the sun's departure bore her airily to the first landing. A torch of twisted glass on the newel post shone into a room where sprawled in chairs people lay sleeping, their limbs leaden and their eyes all closed. Eva paused in curiosity but a neat little man blocked the light. "*Je vous cache la lumière Mademoiselle.*" His voice was gentle so that Eva lingered on the beauty of the sound without realising his meaning. "*Je vous cache la lumière*" he repeated and it was a statement of inflexible fact emphasized by the obdurate slant in his yellow eyes. She would have argued but he waved her on. His shadow lay, daunting, on the second flight of stairs. Eva climbed disconsolately.

Glimmering light sneaked through her thonged sandals picking out silver speckles of sand on her toes. In that noon there had been life, and friction of sun and sea upon rock. She remembered, too, from home the smell of sawdust blown in her lap when the growing wood rasped against steel. Free, she regretted sharply her loss. She stood on the second floor immune.

Then, accepting the end of what had passed she looked forward to the rarified existence proposed for her. No longer subject to hurt or heat, raised high above the ordinary crowds she could watch them with tolerant amusement. Life would be simple, untroubled. When the sun was high she would withdraw; at night in the cool air she would view the world by moonlight. In her own cold country the moon had been at times papery white above the incandescent lights in the centre of the town, and at times orange, tangible like the soft gaslamps at its fringes. Here it would be different as the sun had been different, but not terrible as the sun had been terrible. Sky grape-bloom black with incense swirls of stars would canopy her; and sacrosanct, she would accept what was offered.

Because she was at the top of the stairs a faint stirring of air excited her. She could hear singing, raucous but rhythmic. It ended abruptly, laughing in a throat flung back, stretched, rippling with abandon. Eva hurried to look, thinking her window would give on the square of the clenched town, now laid open for her pleasure. Instead she found herself in the rampart wall high above tinder-dry dark grass which gritted faintly like chafed skin on cold, work-worn hands. A sprinkling of frosting indicated the white town beside the sea which swelled idly too far away to affect her. This, and no more was left for her in the light of a thin little moon in an acid sky, waning.

VAL MULKERNS

THE WORLD OUTSIDE

(An extract from a forthcoming novel, entitled "A Peacock Cry.")

MOST OF THE CHILDREN WERE EARLY THAT MORNING, CREEPING IN subdued and stiff in the unaccustomed shoes, their faces and limbs shining from prolonged scrubbing. Some of the boys looked unusually ugly because of having had their hair savagely attacked with scissors and bowl the previous night by over-zealous mothers, but the girls were glossy and braided and comely, and looked much more confident than the boys, as if handling inspectors would not be much trouble to them. The school master scanned all the faces sharply, planning the traditional reshuffle. Something nervous and trusting in the general atmosphere prompted him to put them at ease, though he was jumpy enough himself.

"Tell me, is it the same crowd at all I have before me, or is it some swanky gang down from Dublin for the day," he grinned at them in Irish, and a relieved pleased ripple of laughter went over the desks. "Let me see now, we'll have to have yourself in the front, Mary Mannion, to show off that brave red ribbon, and let you take yourself to the back desk. Tomas Peig where with God's help you'll get a chance to show the Inspector how to do fractions." The point was that Mary was easy on the eyes and utterly brainless, and Tomas Peig was a bright lad and back benchers were inevitably questioned. "We'll have you over by the window, Muiris, and our friend with the red head in the second row. Will you get those boots back on you this minute, Tadg, and I'll flay the hide off you if I see them anywhere except where they're meant to be. Do you think now that it was to decorate the floor for me your mother went to Clifden last week and handed out a mint of money. No, Sir, well you may be sure the answer is No Sir, and take heed of what I said to you, if you value that hide of yours." But as the reshuffling went on, they understood the unusual bantering humour for what it was, an effort to put them at ease, and their faces beamed gratefully back at him. They were being examined, and God knew what horrible things would happen to them if they failed to please the inspector, and here was Boozy, the decent man, and he with nothing to fear being a Master, soft as butter with them to drive away their nervousness.

"Now listen to me the lot of you. If he speaks to you in Irish don't answer him back in a blast of English just to show

that you know it. Answer him in Irish. Now if he speaks to you in English, what are you to do, Mary Mannion ? ”

“ Answer him in Irish, sir,” said Mary with a bright confident smile. There was a gale of laughter, and Mary was prodded incredulously by her neighbours.

“ Tis a professor of Logic we’ll make out of you. If he speaks to you in English, what will *you* do, tell her, Martin Flaherty ? ”

“ Answer him in English, sir.”

“ Right. Now keep that in your heads. The next thing to remember is if he asks the class in general a question and you think you know the answer, put up your hands. Don’t be afraid. He won’t eat you if you happen to be wrong. He’s probably a fine, well-fed man. The only people whose hands I don’t want to see up for anything are Mary Mannion and Micilín Seán Mullen, because they have a job keeping up with the best of us, and we’ll give them a rest to-day. Next year with the help of God they’ll be ready for anything. Do you hear that now, the pair of you ? ”

“ Yes, sir.” Micilín Seán was beaming with relief and Mary Mannion was sulking.

“ Right. Now the next thing to remember is—” his eyes suddenly caught sight of a figure at the gate—“ that he’s coming up the path this minute, and let you keep as still as mice while I call the register.” There were sighs and gasps and rapid intakes of breath all around, and then utter petrified silence, and everybody answering “ Annso, a Mhaighistear ” in an unrecognisable whisper.

Mr. Mulvey was grey and hunched and small, with heavy-lidded gloomy eyes and a mouth turning down hopelessly at the corners. A first glance, before he opened his mouth, suggested that his voice would be a sick wind among the reeds, but in fact it was big and jolly and when he laughed, which was frequently, you had the fantastic impression that some enchantment had been worked before your eyes and that this was certainly not the man who had walked into the room. It was difficult to say whether his life had taken the form of a victorious battle against his natural temperament, or whether it was only his appearance which belied him. His clothes were silver grey and faultlessly pressed, and he carried a neatly rolled black umbrella and a black brief case.

As he stepped into the room out of the thickening rain, the children scraped to their feet and stood looking at him with dismay. They were more used to fat tweedy red-faced inspectors with patches of leather down their jackets. He shook hands with and spoke a few pleasant words to Mr. McGlynn, and then turned to the pupils with his incredible smile, which showed square

healthy white teeth, slightly prominent, and produced numbers of answering smiles. He was delighted to see them all, absolutely delighted, and hoped to learn more this morning than he had ever done at school. Would they sit down now, and attend to Mr. McGlynn's lesson, and later on he'd have a chat with them. He sat down on the chair which had been placed for him near the window, opened his brief-case, and became again, in a moment, the gloomy little grey man who had entered the room. The schoolmaster finished calling the register, closed the book, and sent Mary Mannion across with it to the inspector. Then the lesson began, Geography. The large map of Europe behind the master's desk was covered by a map of Mexico, and as was his usual custom, he began by giving them a general impression of the country itself, the colour, the atmosphere, then something of its history. His words were alive and interesting, because omnivorous reading of everything from strictly technical works or anthropological works to things like Graham Greene's "The Lawless Roads" had produced complete familiarity. It happened to be Mexico to-day because that was the stage of the syllabus they had reached, but it was the same with everywhere, when he was sober, that is. The three maps which he drew with quick strokes, one of the physical regions, one of the climatic regions, and the third showing produce, were accurate and even beautiful with their lively blending colours. Then the class was set to work, an intricate business because of the different ages. Little working groups were put together, and a resumé of what in particular each had to tackle was given, and the older pupils were set some questions on the lesson.

All this time, the bent little depressed figure by the window appeared to be taking no notice. The register had been scrutinised and laid aside, and also some sample exercise books, and then he seemed to give all his attention to some private papers. The Arithmetic lesson went by, and the Irish grammar lesson, and then towards midday, when a rising wind was lashing the rain against the windows, he stood up and the transfiguring smile shone out.

"Well now I suppose you're all fit for bed, after the work you've done this morning, what?" He drew the required laugh from them, and rubbed his small grey hands happily together. "But before we let you off home there are one or two things which have been puzzling me for some time." He changed rapidly to English. "Tell me, is Mexico in the Northern Hemisphere or in the Southern Hemisphere?" The hands shot up, and so did Mary Mannion's, but it was rapidly lowered. "I see my little friend here with the red ribbon knows and doesn't know. Which hemisphere is Mexico in, will you tell me now, like the sound woman you are?"

"The Southern Hemisphere, sir," said Mary Mannion with superb confidence and a shake of the head. There were the inevitable gasps from the class, and Mr. Mulvey smiled still more brilliantly.

"I don't think we all agree with you there, do we?," and there was an enthusiastic chorus of "No sir!" "The last time I was in Mexico," he went on, directly addressing Mary Mannion, who was smiling engagingly at him, "it was in the Northern Hemisphere. Will you remember that, because I don't think it's moved since then?"

"Yes, sir. No, sir," said Mary Mannion with another engaging smile.

"Well now there's another thing that's been puzzling me. A few weeks ago I went into the dining room of my house in Galway and two of the children had apples, nice big red ones. Seán said, 'Daddy, I'll give you half mine,' and Máire said, 'I'll give you three-eighths of mine, Daddy.' Now I thought a while before I decided which I'd take, and I want you to think now. Which was the more decent offer of the two, Seán's or Máire's?" The hands went up slowly, three, four, six, then ten. "Difficult question to put to a poor simple father, wasn't it? How did I know which to take?" Again he was speaking Irish.

"I'd have taken the both of them, sir," said Mary Mannion in lamentable English, beside herself with the notice she had achieved.

"Ní thuigim," said Mr. Mulvey, with another brilliant smile, and then ignored her. "Well, will you tell me, the boy at the back, there?"

Tomás Peig, to the schoolmaster's joy, got smartly to his feet, held back his fair head and spoke up very clearly. "Seán's offer was the one you should have taken, sir, because he was giving you four-eighths (or a half) and Máire was only giving you three eighths."

"Splendid. If I had been as bright as you now, I wouldn't have done myself out of the eighth of a fine apple."

Before they had quite finished laughing, the inspector turned to the schoolmaster and said, "I think the best thing we can do now is to send them off home for the rest of the day because they're too clever for us."

When they had all filed out into the cloakroom in clattering happiness, Mr. Mulvey's gloomy grey eyes roamed for a while about the schoolmaster's face before the smile broke again and he held out his hand. "That was the only Geography lesson in Ireland that's ever interested me," he said. He glanced quickly again at the schoolmaster's qualifications listed on the sheet before him, and asked sharply: "What are you doing here? We could do with plenty more of your kind in the national schools

throughout the country but—?" He shrugged, half-smiling the question.

"It suits me here," Peter McGlynn said briefly, "I like it."

The inspector shrugged again. "If you ever wanted a change, my friend Dr. Linnane in Galway would jump at a man like you—preparing boys for University scholarships, that sort of thing."

"Thanks," the schoolmaster said without interest, "I'll remember if I ever decide to change. It's very kind of you."

"Nonsense," Mulvey replied, with an old-fashioned air, gathering his things together and fastening the brief-case. "You lived for some time in Mexico, I take it?"

"No. My Grand Tour took the form of a day trip to Liverpool. I never slept a night outside this country in my life."

"Remarkable. I taught, myself, for seven years in Mexico City and you brought it back into this classroom today, the heat, the filth, the colour, the indolence, the preposterous fascination of the place. It's remarkable."

"No," Peter McGlynn smiled, "it's Baedeker, and a studious youth, and Graham Greene and a trick of the tongue. You'll not refuse a bite of lunch with me in our one and only hostelry, Pats Flaherty's?"

"I will not," said the inspector warmly, "I spend my life having lunch with clerical managers and a man can do with a bit of civilisation now and again."

Pats' wife had clearly taken some trouble to see that the catering arrangements of Ballyconnolly would stand up to inspection quite as well as the school. As soon as she had received the schoolmaster's order two days previously, she had set to work, scouring and polishing the little square room off the bar, hunting out her best lace tablecloth, unused since the previous inspector's visit, and fixing a formidable array of family photographs along the mantelpiece. Despite these, the warm, low-ceilinged little room with its scarlet geraniums and looped lace curtains was welcoming to the two men as they stepped in out of the bitter wild morning. The place was permeated by the fragrance of roasting fowl, stewed apples and strong spirits, blending deliciously with the bitterness of turf-smoke. Kate Pats Flaherty bustled busily in and out, talking all the time.

"'Tis frozen and demented the pair of you must be with the hunger, now. Ah, sure I often heard it said a man that works with his brain needs twice the feeding of a man that works with his body, and why wouldn't he, indeed? There was a cousin, of my own, Mr. Mulvey, sir, and there he is before ye on the mantelpiece with the white face there in the middle, and hadn't they got him starved in the college above in Dublin and he going in for a priest. Night and day he was at the books, God pity

him, and he no more than a lad, and there wasn't he only out a priest a few months, and his brother not even married, when he took a delicacy and died on his poor mother, God between us and all harm. 'Twas a fright to the world the way she took it, bawling and crying every time she'd look at a priest for years after. There she is for you now, Mr. McGlynn, on the bend of the mantelpiece with the feathery hat down near her nose, but sure God is good and didn't the second lad, a fine big puck of a boy, go in for a priest after, and he's a curate below in Kerry now. Another sup of that soup, Mr. Mulvey, sir? Or the Master? Well now, I'll have that bird on the table before you'll be finished licking your lips. There he is to your north now, Mr. Mulvey, sir, with the fine soft plucks on him and the holy book in his hands. We had him here now, and you could have seen him only a few weeks ago, and there was never a lad like him for feeding, and wouldn't he need it, I ask you, and him not to be dying on us like his poor brother, God rest his soul." Half of this oration was in English and half in Irish, and during journeys to the kitchen and to the bar the rich strong voice came clearly back to her guests, of whom she expected and desired no response. It was only when the last course had been cleared away and the bottle of whiskey ordered by the schoolmaster was between them on the table, and the smoke from their cigarettes was rising to the low ceiling, that Kate Pats Flaherty drew the door behind her, put her head around it again and said: "I'll leave ye now to yourselves to talk to your heart's content and if there's any other thing in the world ye want, leave a screech out of ye and I'll hear it."

She went, and the door closed at last. In the brief satisfied silence the rain beat in gusty blasts against the window, and the wind swept down the chimney to set the turf leaping and blazing. The hunched grey man in the grey clothes was the first to speak, lifting the gloomy eyes that were flecked now with a faint humour.

"There's Ireland for you now, McGlynn, all of it. Unending rain rattling the windows, and inside a kindly woman boasting about her clerical relations, and two men drinking whiskey, and outside the rest of the world. If Michelangelo painted the Resurrection on her smoky ceiling she wouldn't give it a look or him a thank-you if her portly cousin His Reverence were within miles of the place. Once upon a time we exported scholars and culture to the Continent. Now we export nothing but beasts and priests, God help us." And there began one of those inevitable discussions on what's wrong with the country, that never end and are more common in Ireland than discussions on religion or sex. But before the well-worn tracks had been followed to within reach of their muddy end, the talk under the direction of Mr. Mulvey took a turn to Mexico, and from there to Spain

where he had found his wife, the daughter of a Spaniard who had a ballet company in Mexico but who had left his daughter in Spain to be educated. In the warm half-forgotten enchantment of good whiskey on which the brain floated away like a dead flower and only the senses and the imagination were taut and alive, the schoolmaster felt the sun like the caressing tongue of some fantastic animal, at once savage and tender, and smelled the fruit piled high in the narrow streets, and the bitterness of cheap wine, shivered at the sudden white chill inside the vaulted Cathedrals where black-eyed women chattered and laughed before Mass began and felt no urge to leave their personalities like gifts outside the church door, at which filthy mewling beggars held out diseased limbs; he watched the cypresses shooting eager and dark into warm, star-filled air tingling with the music of De Falla to which a girl was dancing like a flame, twisting and writhing in the dark agony of exorcism; narrow martyred faces of El Grecco floated in a golden mist beside the warm sensual beauties of Velasquez and in a timeless jumble of history real and imagined the sweet sane voice of a woman saint blended with the fat bass of a wandering peasant demanding an island of his master; and over it all, rising and falling like a sea of sound was the music of Albeniz, the 'Iberia,' of which every note was as familiar as the sound of rain beating on grey stone.

He had no clear memory of when exactly the little grey inspector left him, but only a vague impression of a warm hand-grip and a voice urging him to visit the house in Galway to meet Maria, and look at some Spanish etchings and some Mexican carvings, and he vaguely remembered too standing at the door of Pats Flaherty's and watching the huddled grey figure disappearing through driving rain in the direction of his car, and then he remembered turning back into the fire-broken shadows of the bar, the tang of spirits and turf-smoke in his nostrils, and his head bemused with sunlight.

KATE O'BRIEN

ANDANTINO

FERRARA. APRIL 14. ON THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW, GOOD FRIDAY, it will have been five weeks since I came to Italy, five weeks since I descended into the wonderful, new Termini Station at Rome. And to Rome I came then for the first time in a too deferring, too off-putting life. A belated discoverer, indeed, of so exacting a city.

I have never been a note-taker or a jotter-down. Notes, indeed, one has had to take when seeking facts in libraries, museums, and such places of assembled and catalogued information. But personal notes, of the passing day, of the winged, immediate impression—when, rarely, I have attempted them—have always upon later reference offended me, seemed ridiculous, and have jangled tediously against my memory.

But memory, long-trusted ally, is not equal now to the overwork of ten or twenty years ago; and its retina, the hitherto reliable mind's eye, grows not only dim but positively contrary—not to call it, ungratefully, a cheat. So at last, for purposes of work foreshadowed, I become in some sort a note-taker. Reluctantly. Distrustfully. It was always better to remember, and set nothing down until the under-process of remembering moved to express itself and to be concluded. But the careless days of the long reach and the bright chance are gone. And, for instance, here I sit in Ferrara, somewhat to my surprise, and where, God wiling, I shall never sit again; so, it may be that a few years on, trying to remember something or other by my study fire in Roundstone, I shall wonder why I was so much bored in April '54 in the once-glorious Renaissance city of the Este princes. And then, perhaps, perhaps these notes will be at hand—and, perhaps, if I trouble to read them, they will seem, alas, as false to me as have all notes of the immediate which I have ever taken. So let me not be too immediate about this city. Tomorrow I shall be in Ravenna. Let me consider Ferrara from there, or from San Marino—or, more magisterially, from Rome, where I shall be again before the end of the month.

I fled Rome after ten days, not in entire willingness—although indeed that first impact was inexpressibly exhausting to one who came there already tired—but because work in progress made it advisable for me to visit Naples and Milan during this month.

Henry James was in his twenty-fourth year, I think, when he first looked at Rome. He had fallen in love with Venice—as who would not? In Florence he had been uneasy and unwell. But

then he came to Rome, and in his first days there it seemed to him sometimes as if reason might forsake him, under the stress and pressure of its content. Yet he was a young man, well-off, and nourished in leisure; and however immense the combined assault of all the Romes upon his open and nervous imagination, the city which he met in everyday business, in street and café, park and piazza, was of the late 1870's, a city of horse-carriages and gaslight, wherein bells and human voices and the cllop of hooves were the loudest parts of the noise. He did not have added to all the Romes his knowledge and his dreaming showed him the Rome of the machine age, the Rome of Mussolini and post-Mussolini, of war, of invasion, of international "spivvery"—in short, of the chaotic 1950's. Eighty years, a short span, has actually been, on the evidence, a very long time in Rome's long history—and this would surprise Henry James, one of whose necessities was always to take the longest and the slowest view.

Myself also favouring the slow view, I consciously sought to take as nearly as possible no view at all of Rome in those first ten days. Yet when they were over and I was in Naples, I knew very quickly, from the effect of that city upon me, that Rome had indeed made some strong impressions.

But I must let precision wait—or rather, precision still asks me to wait. Rome and Naples—how absurd the English word, Naples!—Rome and Napoli have already packed me up with arbitrary, hasty notions—vivid and unexpected. But all of that confusion must whirl a while and then grow cool before it serves me. That Napoli was restful let me say—yes, restful. After the Roman thunder, the sea-blown sweetness of the scrambling town seduced me into an unfair, unbalanced fit of love. I was to demur, heel back, as from all sudden and unnecessary loves. But, Lord, the soft voices of the Napolitani after the uniform Roman shout; the varied physical beauties of the people—Greek, Norman, Celtic, Jewish, Arab, Sicilian, American—after the too-strong Roman face and bust; the soft, amoral charm of the begging children, the coaxing silliness of the street watch-sellers and the would-be pick-pockets; the naked crumbling beauty of the hilly slum-streets, the gallant *pathétique* of the hung-out washing everywhere; the good manners, the good salt air, the unashamed carelessness, laziness and poverty—ah, I shall write more of Napoli when I get further back from my first and already exhausted fit of love.

Easter Saturday, April 17.

I hate this note-taking. All the more, perhaps, because it isn't note-taking, and because I began it dutifully in Ferrara. I'm in Ravenna now.

It's odd about Ferrara.

I came there from Milan. Milan is a more interesting place than those who don't know it know. I left it on the day the

International Fair began, because I am not interested in such fairs, and because the big city was going to be overcrowded and extremely expensive for the *Fiera* period. Milan is normally expensive, more expensive than Napoli, about the same as Rome. But it is, despite its plain face, an interesting and agreeable city. It has no surrounding beauty, no atmosphere of Italian glamour, and a century of solid success and good citizenship has overlaid its long history. It is grey and orderly, and its most easily assessed possession, after *La Scala* and *Il Duomo*, is its uniform and intelligent good manners. I was glad when I was in Milan to reflect that Manzoni was its great man; the Milanese deserve him, and he is, it seems to me, exactly right as their immortal.

Of *La Scala*—another day, much later—much to say, much to remember.

Ferrara was not picked for me out of a box by a trained canary. I wanted a really quiet town after weeks of movement between three large cities; my travelling companion, who knows Italy well and who is at present in pursuit of the High-Renaissance, quoted Yeats who "... might have lived where falls The green shadow of Ferrara walls . . ." She also quoted from a d'Annunzio sonnet to the town which she had translated. The name Ferrara has always rung musically for me, and, loving my own Shannon at Limerick, I have had a lifelong curiosity about the formidable river Po. So I was well content to depart from Milan for the old, exhausted city of the Princes of Este and of Lucrezia Borgia. Of Ariosto too, and where—I discovered—Savonarola was born and lived his first twenty years. We travelled there, through Bologna, on a lovely day of Spring.

Wherever one travels in Italy one is amazed and edified by the cultivation of the land, and by the quality and skill of that cultivation. Indeed, the uniform aspect of fertility intelligently and industriously forced to man's use and good which the Italian landscape presents leaves one marvelling that there can be any real misery, real poverty in a country at once so passionately blessed by the sun and so gratefully used under that blessing. Yet poverty and misery are here and visible. Napoli is very poor, and so are all its ambient communes of the Campagna; yet the variegated and lovely husbandry of all those lands about Salerno, behind Amalfi, all the cherished fields and orchards fed by Vesuvius and south from there, the roofed-in lemons shelved on crags, the burning oranges, the vines everywhere married to elm and willow and poplar, the apple-trees, the pears, the cherries, the ordered fields of artichokes and onions and *pinocchio*, the sunshine, the flowering varied promise, the resolute industry—all these may puzzle us who find Italy, nevertheless, so poor—but all the way up from the south to Rome, fierce though the contours of the plain and the mountains may be, these carefully won fruits of labour cannot fail to attract and enchant the foreigner's

eyes ; and from Rome to Florence and Bologna, where Tuscan sweetness and green and blue undulations add to all of this a subtle tenderness, and disarm the foreigner in some measure of his foreignness—then the burgeoning, yielding, multi-coloured and multi-shadowed spring, every inch of it promise and love, holds us in wonder, so that we forget the economic puzzle, and rejoice in the sun's love of Italy, and Italy's fervent and grateful response to that love.

But, coming south from Milan with spring further advanced, and turning eastward after Bologna, with the Apennines disappearing, a blue smudge, to the south ; facing ahead the Adrian marshes and the complicated branchings and estuaries of the Po, one finds a plain-faced, dowdy Italy—industrious, still, indeed, and drilled and drained, but definitely home-spun. Excepting only the ubiquitous vine, this middle-eastern plain of Emilia and Romagna cares only for dull-looking cereal crops, and cabbages, onions, mangolds. All useful things, but hardly speaking of the Italian *primavera*, everywhere else on the peninsula now flaunting her short-lived, exquisite and various garlands.

No garlands on the straight line to Ferrara. And Ferrara, forgetful of Isabella d'Este, forgetful of Lucrezia Borgia and of Ariosto, has no taste for such, it seems. A flat, dull town—if ever, disappointedly, I trudged about one. And inhabited now, one is compelled to think, by a flat, dull people.

It is among Italy's happy gifts to her visitors that we *look* at Italians, because beauty has been more generously lavished on them than on most races. In childhood and youth, the foreigner judges, Italians are more likely than not to be beautiful. Middle-age and the rough and tumble of maturity seem to be as hard on them as on the rest of us ; but very many of them advance into life as if, like Botticelli's 'Primavera,' asserting the innocent principle of physical beauty. So—for good cause—we look at them, in Venice, in proud Rome, in crazy, tattered, elegant Napoli.

But in Ferrara, no.

The first night there, disappointed already by the size, noise, and commonplace aspect of the town as we drove from the station, we set out in search of dinner, and halted indeed, awe-struck, under the moated towers of the Castello—huge fortress of the Este princes, which still, as it is suitably still the seat of all kinds of civic authority, dominates and bullies in silence from its stony, central position. At first, made to pause by it when hungry and uncertain of one's way, and when the night is cold and starry, one takes the Castello seriously ; but after a day or two of strolling round and past it one sees it for the huge expression of dull arrogance that it was and is. It was austere and cleanly built and the colour of its brick is lovely—but it is, nevertheless, a tedious expression of Ferrara's former power, and one

which the Renaissance artists and humanists—however the house of Este patronised them—can only have deplored.

Leaving it, we went down a noisy street, seeking a *ristorante* or a *trattoria*. And suddenly in a little square we found the Cathedral, the facade of the Cathedral. Ferrara's jewel, Ferrara's manifest, lonely proof that she once exacted beauty and achieved it. The exquisite exterior of this church suffered injury, especially on the lovely south cloister, during the war; but the great campanile went unharmed, and so did the front, this western facade that we came on, so little expecting it that we both cried out, astounded. Broad, flat, quite *romanico*, pink and grey, set easy to the wide base, and gently, peaceably, deeply embellished; this melting upward into the subtler and more holy early Gothic, dove-grey, gentle, yet packed with eternally-fixed expressions of faith; faith still tender, still almost deprecating for all its strength; and Our Lady, exquisite, at the centre; bending in grace, sheltered by Gothic skill and device. Ferrara's jewel still indeed.

But do not trust poets. Yeats, after all, never set foot in Ferrara, where there is no "green shadow," and where the "walls" are only, here and there, a bit of grassy dyke—on which relievedly indeed one can walk at evening, and breathe some thin refreshment from a few plantations of poplar trees; looking eastward to Dante's Ravenna, and promising oneself that one will be there to-morrow. And so homeward, through long, plain streets of the most exemplary sixteenth and seventeenth century domestic architecture, let it be said; but also through exemplary groups of short, plain citizens, to a plain dinner, difficult to find. Our hotel had no restaurant, and that can be a very fatiguing lack, even though it is in general economical and satisfactory to eat elsewhere than in one's hotel. But in a place like Ferrara, where the ordinary life of the town is almost curiously empty of charm, and where the few restaurants are dull, it would be a relief to be able to stay where one was, after the long, exemplary streets, and eat never mind what without having to traipse past the Castello and over and back.

The bread in Ferrara is a curiosity. There is no getting, in that city, an eatable piece of bread. I tried every way and everywhere, and studied the bakeries with attention. No good. All the bread, all white, the whiteness of numbed fingers, is kneaded and twisted to the consistency of thin serge. This cheap serge is then whirled into "amusing" tight shapes; the favourite design being a pair of horns. A pair of small serge horns baked hard and brought to a fine polish is not easy to tackle with morning tea. I have eaten many kinds of bad bread—during the war; and in France after the war, I was in Avignon when a decent woman there committed suicide because she could no longer face the fearful yellow, dusty bread of that fearful year. But the bread which

contents the Ferrarese—well, more of this bread business in Ravenna. But a prosperous city which has no music, no theatre, no trees worth talking about, no pictures, no scenery, no air, no gardens, deserves to eat serge horns.

Ravenna. April 24.

Now, this morning, having business in the telegraph office, we spoke with the friendly fat man there who knows that "O'" means that one is Irish and who has a brother in Glasgow and he thrust at us his copy of the local morning paper, *Il Resto de Carlino*, which contained a long and rapturously proud account of the opening in *Dublino* of an exhibition of mosaics of Ravenna. This was indeed surprising and sweet news from home, and we bought the paper and read the article with full attention in the nearest *caffé*. P. J. Little, Mr. Aiken, Tom McGreevy, the College of Surgeons, the *bellissimo palazzo* of the eighteenth century—how delicious to read of all these homely symbols here in a little small-town paper, and on the lost edge of the Adriatic!

One can only wonder what they *are* exhibiting in Stephen's Green. The article told us that a lady of Ravenna is giving demonstrations in the craft of producing copies of the old mosaics, and that a professor explains the processes necessary to such work. Excellent. And if the exhibited reproductions are good they may well suggest something of the treasure deposited here by young Christianity, by Arian Christianity. But that, forever with the dew of morning on it, as pure and narrative of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, that is fixed here forever on the walls of a few basilicas. Only here, in Sant Apollinare Nuovo, can we see the procession of the Virgin Martyrs, led by the Magi, to Our Lady and the angel-guarded child; only here, in San Vitali, where fabric and light, visible form and essential ideas, are one in Christian expression—only here, in one small, pure temple which is in its entirety a just and right tribute to the God of all the Testaments—only here can we see the Lamb of God protected by the four angels; only here can we see Abraham entertaining angels, and Abel and Melchisedech offering their sacrifices—here and elsewhere in Ravenna are forever fixed, in detail and in large, the first, fresh, lovely, formal visions of the Testament stories, set down with care and skill and with every decoration of symbolic love, in generations when the story was radiantly new, and a resounding answer to the creative and the passionate heart.

Ravenna contains, immovably, save by destructive modern war, an unparalleled exposition of what the Gospels meant to their first readers and believers. These glorious, formal and innocent illustrations of the great news of the first new century are immured in temples mostly in structure faithful to them, though some, indeed, have suffered overhaul across the centuries. They are Ravenna's splendour—and studying them over many days one keeps on understanding more and more that no town could hold in charge a greater treasure. There was no need of Dante's

bones. Yet he must have understood these exquisite mosaics, and even smiled at them, while he worked out *Il Paradiso* and prepared to die.

Ravenna is a reliquary, a chalice, a holy container. Not for anything could one regret being in the place where San Vitali is, or the Duomo Baptistry, or either of the Sant' Appolinarie. Nevertheless, the present-day town is itself a bore. The Adriatic receded from it long ago, and it is many a long day since its harbour, Classe, was vitally important to Rome's imperial plans; it is a long time since the Flaminian Way, which begins at the Piazza del Popolo in Rome, ended—having dodged the Apennines south of Rimini—at Ravenna, leaving the Cisalpine Plain open to the legions. It is a long time indeed since Caesar crossed the Rubicon a few kilometres south of where I at this moment sit.

Well, to look about, to walk about this flat and noisy town, you would need no stressing of all that. Ravenna, save on the great walls of a few churches, has lost its history as it has lost its washing sea. Like Ferrara, it possesses, unaware, some lovely streets. But like Ferrara and with less excuse it is a dull place, inhabited by dull and plainfaced people. And like Ferrara, it bakes appalling bread, the same cheap serge, tailored into the same fearful horns. Nevertheless, leaving it to-morrow, turning for sweet Tuscany and for the fierce exactions of Rome, I shall not remember the dull, modern features of Ravenna and its citizens. I shall think of walking into San Vitali for the first time, when the light was thinning. The surprise of that first entry and of the architectural vision of grace—let alone what came afterwards on the walls—that would be memory enough. So I shall not catalogue boringly. Ravenna is not Moscow—it is get-at-able. It is indeed at this very moment crazy-packed with earnest tourists, all speaking German so far. So, it occurs to me, to go on about San Vitali, or the Mausoleum of Calla Placidia, may by now be as silly as to describe the Eiffel Tower for the folks at home. And also I remind myself that *Dublino* is at present under instruction! So—goodbye to the processing Virgin Martyrs, goodbye to Dante's *ossa gloriosa*, and to the now dreary, slummy Marina di Ravenna where Byron rode in fury by the waves. Could he see those sands and pinewoods now! Ah—if there was ever piety, in the Latin sense, the twentieth century either denies or has not felt it!

I turn back to a great city, where against and also in consort with all forces, history has enforced its piety. I return to Rome, forgetting the boring shabbiness and dullness of modern Ravenna, and secure in memory of true life shining on the walls of her basilicas.

(To be continued)

NORAH HOULT

JAMES STEPHENS

JAMES STEPHENS WAS A MAN WHO DID WHAT ONLY THE VERY FEW have ever done: he inspired both gods and mortals. All poets, according to their stature, inspire the gods, since they are their chief creators, filling them with the breath of life that winds may for ever blow from high Olympus for our refreshment. But seated by the fireside, or even in a tavern, and more often than not they are listened to with respect rather than joy. Their genius is muted; they may stutter like Goldsmith or become as pompous as a politician. Not so with this poet. At the beginning his appearance would startle the wandering eye into attention, for he was a very small man with a long face and big domed head, moving swiftly, with the unconscious grace of a child. Then the ear would be caught for he spoke in a beautiful voice whose brogue came from none of the four provinces but was something he had made completely his own. From then one was stayed under the spell of a conversationalist whose talk for sheer creative quality has seldom been equalled and never surpassed. The names of two other famous Irishmen to whom I have often listened come to my mind: A. E., who discoursed so brilliantly on abstract ideas that he sent even the dullest away wondering, and Oliver Gogarty, happily still with us, whose amazing memory for ballad and verse is joined to a bubbling wit, often cruel, but at its best dazzling in its swift incisiveness.

But wit kills conversation, and James Stephens, who could never have killed anything at all, was the true descendant of the old bards who, wandering from cottage to hall, paid for their board by song and story, by the embroidery of the commonplace which opens our eyes to its true quality. The other day I asked a friend, who met him for the first time not long before his death, of what he had talked. "He talked a lot about fleas," she answered, "of the marvellous precision with which they jumped." I nodded, for this was one of his gifts, to irridate everything from fleas to St. Patrick, from goats to the legend of Deirdre of the Sorrows.

Then I spoke to another friend, now a doctor, who nearly forty years ago when he was a medical student in Dublin, had known James Stephens, asking what he remembered of him. "I tell you what I remember," he answered. "I was sitting for an examination, and went out halfway through for a glass of stout. In the bar I met James sitting with his packet of sandwiches. He shared the sandwiches with me and he talked. I had never heard anybody talk like that before, so I thought: to hell with the examination! I'm better here. So I never went back to the hall."

Well, the thousands of people who were startled when they heard him on the radio, his voice bringing the breath of life and of fairy-land into close rooms, can still bear witness to the magic he wrought; in this article I do not want to write more about James Stephens, the entertainer, or even the poet, since his books are on the shelves, but to say something about the essential man who was the container of these great gifts.

He was born in or near Dublin in February, 1883. We know the date because he delighted in telling how James Joyce accosted him with the news that they were both born precisely the same day, a strange matter which Joyce considered should be discussed over a glass, with its fullest astral implications analysed. We do not, however, know his exact birthplace nor who his parents were, for the reason that he was reticent on these matters. Two American papers after his death made up their minds that he was born in a Dublin slum, so lest this facile reading should spread into an indelible record, let me repeat that the precise truth is not known even to his wife. It was a subject on which I never questioned him, but when the colour of some conversation suggested to his exquisite sensibility that he might appear to be withholding return coin he made a story for me. It does not matter whether this was or was not according to the fact. What is certain is that his childhood was insecure, that from an early age he had to fend for himself and knew loneliness and hunger.

But he experienced no long probation as poet. From Dublin the news went abroad that A.E. had discovered a solicitor's clerk who was also a genius. This was the time he loved to recall when one day reading poetry he suddenly decided, "I can do that." And he did. He wrote poems, fast and furiously, and entirely without effort, sending them to Arthur Griffith for *Sinn Féin*, to A.E. for his *Homestead*, slipping, as his old friend, Miss Elizabeth Bloxham, has told me, half a dozen lyrics under her door late at night so that she would pick them up in the morning. His name comes into *Ulysses* in Joyce's record of a conversation between A.E. and Dedalus; his brown eyes and gentleness are mentioned with approbation by Moore in *Hail and Farewell*; he seems to have arrived suddenly and joyously, a prodigy of the Celtic Renaissance. And with the appearance of *The Crock of Gold* in 1912 fame was secured.

The same year saw the publication of *The Charwoman's Daughter*, that lovely tender story which is my own favourite among all his prose works. In the following year there was *Here Are Ladies*. and in 1914, *The Demi-Gods*. Those years before the first world war, and before the Irish Rebellion, were the golden years for the Irish capital when to have been a Dubliner must have been bliss enough, but to be James Stephens very heaven.

My own first encounter came somewhere about 1920 when as a young girl I sat timidly in A.E.'s drawing room in Rathgar Avenue listening for the first time in my life to the conversation of

the great ones. The door opened and a dark little man with bright brown eyes came in. Everyone, I noticed even then, seemed to sit up more alertly because of this new arrival. Well, of course! He was, it appeared, the author of the famous *Crock of Gold*. The conversation turned on Henry James. At once a stream of gay and exaggerated vituperation came from his lips. He couldn't, it appeared, abide Henry James. Suddenly he stopped: a tiny mouse had sped across the floor. "Oh, what a doaty mouse!" he cried out in joy, and confounded I realised that here was someone who loved mice. Many years were to pass before I learnt that James Stephens loved every creature made by "the Craftsman that fashioned the fly and the bird."

But so it was. And this brings us to the essential nature of this poet. He had much to give, and he gave generously and abundantly without one thought of hoarding. That is the way of God; it cannot, also, be the usual way of men. Most of us arrived here do our best to adapt ourselves to the measure of the rules we find ready prepared. We must do our utmost to get on; we cannot permit ourselves to give carelessly because we must think of our old age; we must not trust too much or we shall be betrayed. And so forth and so on. Now James never in all his life took these rules seriously. It probably seemed to him when his genius as a poet bubbled up so spontaneously that he had no need to do so. But he married early; he had a wife, a step-daughter, and soon a son to provide for; and when after the first war his post as curator at the Dublin Art Gallery ended and he went to Paris, he had to recognise that few poets can support a family by writing poems, and that even the dollars from *The Crock of Gold* were not inexhaustable.

It was clear that his other gifts must be utilised. First he turned lecturer, calling up his knowledge of Celtic mythology to lecture at the Sorbonne. There is a tale he enjoyed telling of that period. After giving a talk he met a learned professor, also interested in Irish myth. "Monsieur," he declared, "I understand we have the same mistress!" Telling the story he would add, "You should have seen the way the savant's face stiffened, how he drew himself up, how disapproving he obviously was until I added, 'Yes: her name is Deirdre of the Sorrows.' And then what a change! How he beamed; how almost he embraced me!"

There followed those American lecture tours which may be taken in their stride only by those of an iron constitution and perhaps some thickness of skin. James possessed neither of these useful worldly assets. A completely impractical man who never managed during all the years he lived in London to find his way about its chief thoroughfares, he would surely have lost his way entirely in the huge continent had it not been that he invariably inspired those whom he met with the protective feeling. The late W. T. H. Howe, President of the American Book Company, has told me how he sent one of his men along with James to make

sure that he arrived more or less on time to speak to the Women's Clubs, those voracious devourers of "culture." Even so the strain must have been and was tremendous; even so he twice succumbed to sickness. "Never get pneumonia in Chicago," was one of his pieces of advice.

When he finally came back to London, the spirit was still willing, as it remained to the end, but the flesh was much weaker. "The machine is wearing out," he would say when he returned from the country where for the sake of his wife he had spent some years of the war. With the result that while he accepted broadcasting invitations, and was meticulous to give of his very best, he was no longer equal to social occasions. The last of these was his visit to Dublin to receive the degree of Doctor of Literature conferred on him by Trinity College, and the arduous of Irish hospitality, pleasant though they were, left their mark. He was able now only for the company of a very few; perhaps it was because he could not give as he had previously given to people that he sought out the birds in Trafalgar Square, saving scraps from his plate for them, making a special pet of a lame pigeon, murmuring caressing words to every cat he met on the road. Those who did not understand complained, complained that they received no reply to their letters; others knowing his love for Ireland busied themselves in trying to get him back there for a long holiday. Indeed he would have liked to go, crying out repeatedly the longing of the old exiled bard for *Death in Ireland!* It was too late. He who had travelled the world, who had entertained the great and the humble, had now to keep to his house.

But no one with merely a casual eye who went to see him in those last days after a very serious operation would have known how sick he was. He would spread out for them some of his old stories, telling them as only he could tell them, his one worry being that maybe someone, perhaps myself, had heard them before. He would rack his brain, and then turning say, "I think, perhaps, this will be new to you." His courtesy was such a lovely thing that inevitably one now thinks of his own words with which to mourn him: "Nor is left a trace of those who did of grace all that was grace."

But it would be wrong to stop on a sad note, for the joy and beauty he gave remain a priceless possession. I would like instead to quote the words of a young Irish priest who, greatly admiring his work, sought him out:

"He was essentially of the very spirit of goodness, and I loved everything about him. I know that they were waiting for him at the Gate, knowing that Heaven wasn't quite full without his lovely seraphic spirit."

And because he of whom I have written so feebly would always like to wave a gay farewell let me end with a story that may bring a smile. He would always want to be giving presents, and there was a bookstall attached to an hotel restaurant where we sometimes

had luncheon together. As we came by he stopped, wanting to buy a magazine for me, but I insisted truthfully that there was nothing I cared for. "We are poor people; let us save the money for a drink instead." He took no notice, but to my surprise picked up a Penguin Book, called *Science News*, and passed the coin required to the sales girl. In horror I cried, "James, you must know that like yourself I know nothing, and have no wish to know anything, of Science." For answer he took out his pen, and when I looked over his shoulder he had written, "Dear Norah Hoult, Never say that there was anything I wouldn't give you. James Stephens."

There was nothing that he wouldn't have given anybody if he could.

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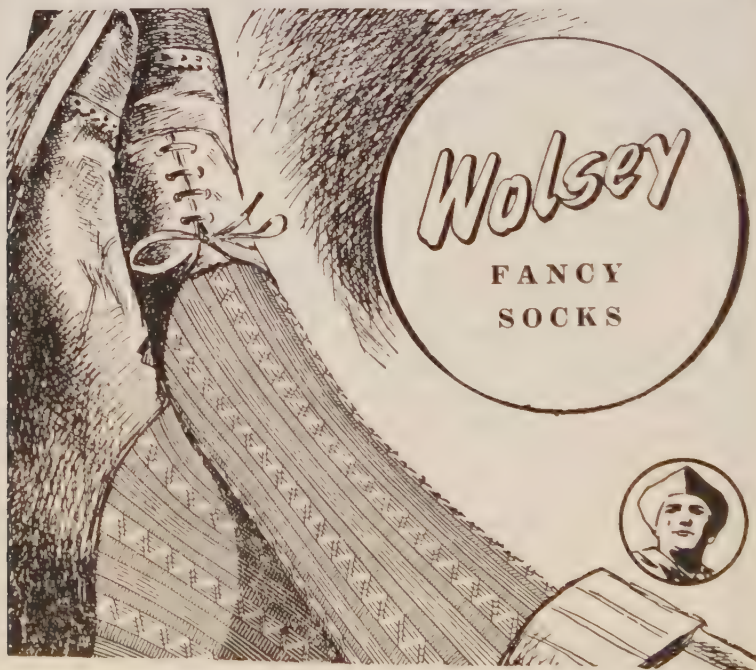
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Poetry Ireland 25

EDITED BY DAVID MARCUS

TEMPLE LANE

In The Room

BLANAID SALKELD

Learning Life

MICHAEL SCOT

Two Poems

TEMPLE LANE

In The Room

All the world over, firelight is the same:
the mind sits free aloft on phoenix-wings:
walls become soluble: the lambent flame
restores the personalities of things
emotionally charged with all the tactile
vibrations from a thousand hands and absorbing
the associations of twice-a-thousand eyes—
they will be furniture again in the morning!

All the world over. And I who crouch within
the incanted circle am free. Day-chains are not
filed merely but dissolved. No more a prisoner
to malignant heredity upon one spot.
I am one piece with all the past, the peaceable
tracts that are lit by fire in childhood's night,
when in the dark although no escape was possible
a human guardian angel struck a light
and showed the shadows not monstrous but benign.

All the world over firelight is the same.
In one of several other lives did I
face, chained, the mob and dare the stake and flame,
Heaven-abducted before flame reached me? or are the psyche-
probers right who stake professional luck on names
equating to repressions in the mind?
Laugh and fly, phoenix!

I thought that someone came
and pressed the switch and said—*Why must you sit
there in the dark?* so the duplicity
each grim day holds betrayed the peace in me:
dour earth set hard and I was one with it.

BLANAID SALKELD

Learning Life

II

No sound or sign. The boundless family
 Of sparrows overflowing the smooth hedge
 Outside my window. And a cold keen edge
 Slipped amid tenderness so fair and free—
 Is another story. For bird and tree
 And young girl's heart, pleasure may be in pledge—
 Lightly to be redeemed, as I allege:
 Beauty is never long in jeopardy.
 Irrelevantly I exclaim, how fine
 The world's music, I am doomed not to hear—
 As I hail essential joy, out of reach!
 Youth has still much delight to tell and teach.
 And a few learn to call out sweet and clear,
 So beauty draws near, uttering sound and sign.

III

Never is a long day. Must I stay it out?
 Better than time's punctual axe, cutting off
 Our unrealities of hope and love.
 Can I keep on despairing? Am I so stout?
 Essence of life . . . the sinners laugh and flout,
 Sensing only the perishable stuff.
 I shed salt tears, yet never weep enough
 For what day does not care to think about.
 Stay. I have found you. Though the tall trees toss
 Negation on negation. And the wind
 Has taught black heresy to the myriad lips
 Of rivers and the budding flowers—sun strips
 The hills of dew and cloud—and still we find,
 They do not yield their dream, for any loss.

V

Having shrugged off the grim day's cloudy horde—
 The plain sky flames so lovely and so long
 Abroad its unbound spaces and among
 The far-apart trees, glowing in accord—
 To the last, murmuring of its sunk lord.
 Could this—hope's—colour sound into a song,
 It might somehow undo the senseless wrong
 Of doubt and slipped endeavour, with no word . . .
 Our words brought us to infidelity—
 Made us forget the music, the far calls

That taught escape from this interior ill,
 Built up of words. Here, shut off from my will,
 I start to crumble with the ruinous walls,
 Endlessly down, forever, from the sky.

(The above poems are extracts from a sonnet-sequence.)

MICHAEL SCOT

The Way Things Are

Were she and I in England now, or France maybe—or Spain,
 Aye or the West Indies itself, I might be better off !
 She might be glad to see me in some far foreign place
 And let me stay beside her telling my love till dawn.

But as it is, although she lives only across the road
 I lie love-stricken on my bed, beyond all doctor's wit,
 And she—she that alone could cure the sickness of my soul—
 Has mocked me from her threshold before the lamps are lit.

The Aspen Tree

Love has me like an aspen in the wind
 My moody leaves ruled by each passing breath
 And if you may not still my thoughts, my mind
 Will never rest before the calm of death.

If this land were the way it ought by right
 You'd be a queen behind a castle wall
 Both Gael and Gall would court you day and night
 But och what chance would I have then at all?

You promised—and you told a lie no doubt—
 You'd listen near the sheepfold for my greeting:
 I let a whistle and a thousand shouts
 And nothing answered only the lambs bleating.

You passed me later—'twas too dark to see
 But at full noon you passed me too: so now
 If you walked in this minute coaxing me
 I'd make the very devil of a row!

(The above poems are imitations of Douglas Hyde's 'Songs of Connacht').

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